William Riley Parker

# Milton

## A Biography

## I

## THE LIFE

Oxford : at the Clarendon Press

This is the first attempt in eighty-five years to tell the complete story of John Milton's life and work, and much has been learned about the blind poet, his family, and his friends since Masson's monumental *Life* (1859–80). The new biography reflects not only this recent scholarship—including the author's own research—but also changed attitudes toward Milton and his poetry. Because *Milton: A Biography* tries to answer any question that one might reasonably ask about Milton's life, the documentation (in a separate volume) is very full, and a full index is augmented by a finding-list. Among other features, the work includes bibliographical data and the results of a world-wide census of surviving copies of seventeenth-century editions of Milton.

£15.00 *net*
300s *net*
net UK
FOR THE SET OF TWO VOLUMES
U.K. ONLY

GLOUCESTER COUNTY COLLEGE LIBRARY
PR3581 .P27
Parker, William Riley,
Milton: a biography.
3 2927 00021 2098

HC 4 80 ec

89-00165

89-00165

PR 3581 .P27 Vol.1
Parker, William Riley, 1906-
1968.
Milton: a biography

WITHDRAWN FROM
RCSJ LIBRARY

GLOUCESTER COUNTY COLLEGE
LIBRARY / MEDIA CENTER
Tanyard Road
Sewell PO, NJ 08080

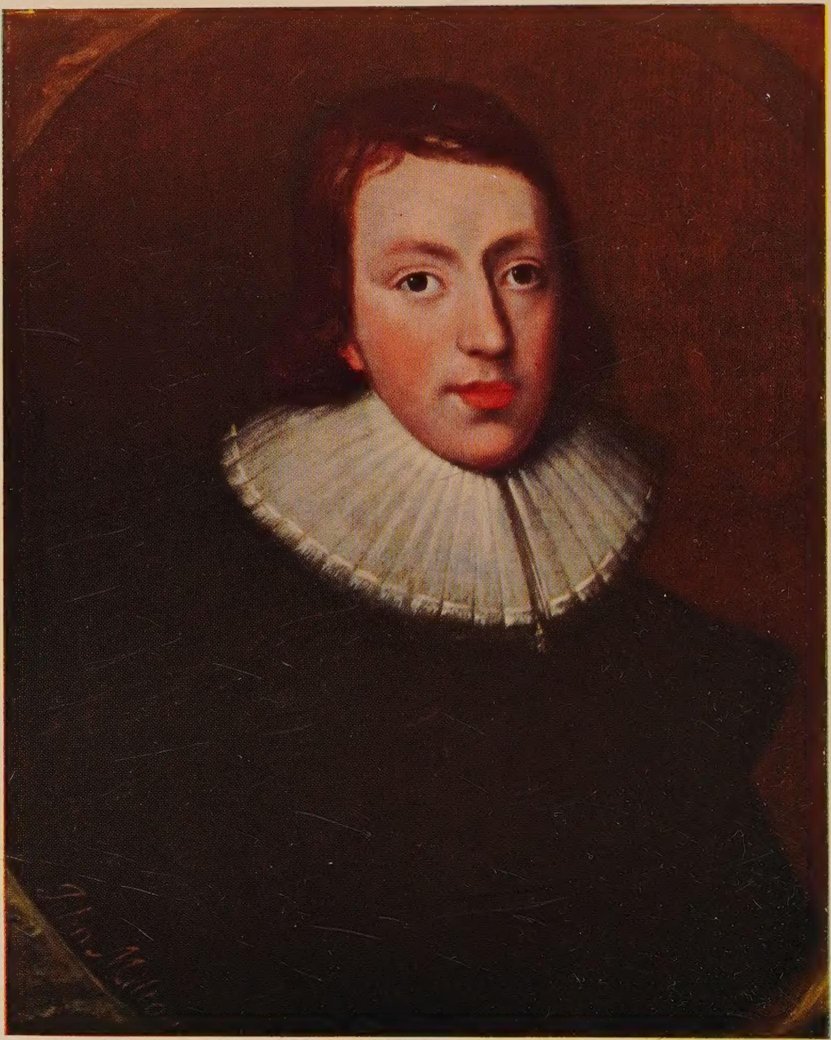
DEMCO

# MILTON

## *A BIOGRAPHY*

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_C0-CDB-532



Milton as a Student at Cambridge

WILLIAM RILEY PARKER

# MILTON

## A BIOGRAPHY

I

THE LIFE

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

*Oxford University Press, Ely House, London W.1*
GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
CAPE TOWN SALISBURY IBADAN NAIROBI LUSAKA ADDIS ABABA
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI LAHORE DACCA
KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE HONG KONG TOKYO

© OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 1968

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FIRST PUBLISHED 1968
REPRINTED 1969

*To*

MAB

# Preface

LET me say at once that I like Milton as a person. If I did not, I might have undertaken literary criticism or some other kind of research, but I would not have undertaken biography. I began this task as I have ended it, with deep respect for Milton as an artist; but I also began, and ended, with genuine liking for the man as I understood him. Having stated the fact, I must add that I shall be disappointed if my readers do not readily discover my reasons. For it is good to be able to like where one is compelled to admire, and I am partisan enough to hope that this biography will prove to be something more than peripheral commentary on immortal verse.

A biographer of Milton is liable to be so humbled by his genius and erudition that he minimizes the essential humanity. On the other hand, Milton wore his learning lightly, as became a good humanist. In the polite monologue of poetry he could drop a classical allusion as easily and as naturally as we can now drop a hint; his allusions were, in fact, a kind of shorthand back in the days when the gentle reader was prepared to accept such dictation. In a less (or differently) learned age the critic faces, therefore, a nice problem if he hopes to convey accurately his author's purpose. (Commentary which painstakingly explains Milton's allusions, while oh-ing and ah-ing over Milton's learning, presents a pretty paradox.) Then there is Milton's Latin. Since Latin is no longer the universal language of the educated, an intelligent reader may today be intimidated before he even starts to read, and a biographer is embarrassed when Latin verse composed at the age of seventeen impresses some people as no less marvellous than the structure and music of *Paradise Lost.*

My solution to these problems will not please everyone, but it is a solution which tries to be as fair to Milton as to those who would understand him. In general, I have interpreted the intent, rather than explained the meaning, of allusions; I have modernized seventeenth-century spelling and punctuation; and I have translated into English all Latin or Greek passages which it seemed necessary to quote. Some of these translations are my own; others are borrowed or are eclectic; and as Milton says in his Seventh Prolusion: *quod pejus est*, *sermo nescio quis*, *Americanus credo* 'what's worse, I don't know what the language is—American, I guess.' I have ventured commentary and literary judgements on many of Milton's English poems, but on the Latin, Greek, and Italian verses I have limited myself largely to biographical comment, thus respecting, I trust, the interest of most of my readers as well as my own limitations as a critic. Moreover, to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* I have devoted much less space than their length and importance might seem to call for. To have discussed them on the same scale as my discussion of (say) *Lycidas* or *L'Allegro* would have added literally hundreds of pages to this volume, which tries throughout to serve as an introduction to Milton's climactic efforts.

The greatest Life of Milton has long been, and long will continue to be, the six-volume labour of David Masson. Since my own work is no presumptuous attempt to supersede so stately a memorial, comparisons can only be pointless. I have chosen a smaller canvas. In common with all who view Milton today, I have perched like a pygmy on Masson's noble shoulders, and if I have seen a few things which he overlooked in his monumental biography, it is because I am later born. My debt to him will be so obvious that I dare to hope for recognition of my different purpose.

I have tried to write about an unusual human being who led an interesting life, who had interesting thoughts, and who wrote a great deal more memorably than most other human beings. I have assumed that his works are easily accessible to the reader (in the complete Columbia edition or elsewhere), the Latin works with English translations, the English works reproduced verbatim. I have assumed that the reader who is curious to know more about the social, political, religious, or literary history of the time can easily go to a number of excellent books which did not exist when Masson wrote. I have not tried to set down everything I know about Milton but have attempted, instead, a portrait which omits no significant detail. Those who want arguments, conjectures, documents, and peripheral data will discover that my notes are full. Others will find, I hope, a narrative which develops a complete and understandable life.

Though many readers already know this, perhaps I should warn at the outset that there is one vast gap between Milton's basic ideas and those predominant in our own world; we shall never understand him by ignoring the gap and focusing our attention upon his 'modern' views of censorship or divorce or education or politics. Milton's conception of human freedom was bound up inextricably with religion. He would not, as posterity has done, separate spiritual values from natural values. Science without spiritual direction, government without spiritual direction, education without spiritual direction, were to Milton not only 'wrong' but eventually self-destructive. Liberty without a wakeful sense of moral responsibility was to him, not liberty at all, but 'licence'. Looking soberly upon our atom-haunted world, we might think twice before dismissing these convictions as trite or old-fashioned. It could be argued that in three hundred years we have done a remarkable job of proving him right. Perhaps, when we are humble and ready to listen, he has something yet to say to us. In any case, let us understand clearly the core of his opinions, and when we have occasion to remark his seeming modernity, let us remember always the difference.

I must also express my belief that any attempt to distinguish between Milton the Poet and Milton the Man is foredoomed to failure. The invisible line sometimes supposed to exist between literary criticism and enlightened biography of a literary figure defies detection in this instance. Milton's developing personality demands recognition in most of his early verse, and in his more mature compositions the artist and the man are inseparable. With confidence in technical skill there came to him an urgent and persistent conviction that significant art should be *of* as well as *by* the artist. Other English poets may have spent equal pains upon their work; no other devoted such care to his personal life as a fitting instrument for poetry.

We must not conclude from these facts that Milton was driven by any urge of self-expression. Late in life he experienced something of that essential loneliness of spirit which prompts the lyric outburst, moving man to put words on paper instead of into the compassionate ears of friends; but most of Milton's poetry is distinctly social in tone. It springs not from the desire to express himself, but from the need to communicate, the need to participate; and it assumes an understanding, if limited, audience.

When the boy grew to manhood and saw his destiny more clearly, he eventually came to think of himself as a Spokesman, as a Chosen One, not by whom, but through whom, Truth was to be made known. This was not mysticism, but rather an impersonal faith in human Reason, together with a half-classical, half-Calvinistic belief in 'election'. Although there was great pride there was also genuine modesty in the conviction. 'I conceived myself to be, not as my own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded.' He, the Spokesman, was comparatively unimportant; his words, God-directed, were imperative. If the distinction between the man and the voice became at times hazy in the man's thinking, it is understandable. The distinction was nevertheless real —real to him, that is.

You and I can look back, now, with clear eyes and without emotion. We can see everything which he failed to see—that many of his claims were preposterous, his demands unrealistic; that England was not yet ready for the liberty which he envisaged; that the world was not and is not composed of Miltons. We can call him (as he has been called) 'a political imbecile'. We can laugh at his moods of prophecy, sneer at his undigested ideas. In other words, like logical Satan, we can feel superior as Hell.

And what does it gain us? To understand Milton's matchless verse we must understand and sympathize with Milton the man. Deliberately to deprive ourselves of Milton's verse is worse than political imbecility; it is cultural idiocy. To turn our backs upon the art because we disagree with the artist is an act of intellectual suicide. Yet understanding Milton is not easy. Trying to do so, trying to trace him closely through the stages of his mental and artistic development—as I attempt in the pages to follow—is a kind of necessary arrogance in the biographer which he trusts the charitable reader will forgive.

Another matter requires another kind of explanation. Since, whatever his doubts or reservations, the biographer must put *somewhere* everything he uses, one of his most vexing problems is deciding where first to speak of the composition or happening which cannot be dated except in terms of a period of years or even decades. The common practice, unless new evidence has been found, is to perpetuate the guesses, sometimes venerable, of one's predecessors. Unfortunately, this practice tends to discourage scepticism and the search for new evidence. This biographer, therefore, has ventured in a number of instances to propose new dates even though these conjectures have no more (and no less) actual evidence behind them than have those to which we have been long (and too long) accustomed. His motive is to challenge the spurious authority of mere repetition and to inspire the reconsideration of pertinent data. The fair-minded will not misrepresent this motive as a crow, and then hope that I shall eventually have to eat it. In still other instances, particularly in the dating of poems, when my own long-considered guesses have run counter to those which much repetition has given a false look of certainty, I have not hesitated to adjust the chronology to my personal views. Problems of chronology are never solved by inattention.

For all dates from 1 January to 24 March I have given the year by present reckoning, printing, for example, 2 February 1632 instead of 2 February 1631/2 (or giving the year as it perhaps occurs in the original document, 2 February 1631). After some hesitation, I have considered this practice more helpful, and must ask my reader to take it on faith that I have been alert to the problem, watching always for those who, like Milton's friend Gill, used modern reckoning. On the other hand, as a reminder to my reader, I have usually noted the ten days' difference between the English and continental calendar (e.g., 2/12 February 1632) when continental dating is involved.

A few words should be said here about the significance of my data on public and institutional libraries containing seventeenth-century editions of Milton. In 1963 I wrote to, or visited, every library which I thought might have copies (and, in addition, almost every library in the Greater London area). Of a total of 852 libraries thus surveyed, I found 424 which had no seventeenth-century editions. Of the remaining 428, which do have one or more copies of potential interest to Miltonians (and to future bibliographers), 145 are in Great Britain, 164 in the United States and Canada, 102 on the continent of Europe, and 10 in Australia and New Zealand. There were about 50 other libraries which never answered my letter or letters, but I am much indebted to the 852 librarians who did, in a number of instances writing to me three or four times in patient response to sometimes fussy questions. (I am especially indebted to Mr. Donald Wing of Yale University, who generously made available to me, not only the data on which his *Short-Title Catalogue* was based, but also much supplementary material, all of which I checked with the libraries themselves.) Though I have undoubtedly overlooked some interesting collections, and though I did not succeed in verifying all items reported to me from union catalogues or other sources, the unprecedented scope of my survey permits, I think, some generalizations about the more important collections, for the benefit of future students of Milton. These generalizations will be found in the text and notes of my final chapter.

On the other hand, it has been difficult to find meaningful terms to describe the relative scarcity of specific editions or issues. If it be agreed that a book which survives in more than twenty copies is not to be called 'rare' or 'scarce' (Wing put the figure at ten), then none of the most often sought-for titles qualifies—not even *Comus* or *Of Education* or the *Lycidas* volume—and we realize that 'rare' has long been a dubious synonym for 'desirable' or 'expensive'. I have tried in the following pages to be more informative, and have called a title 'rare' if there are only twenty or fewer copies known—'excessively rare' if there are only ten or fewer. This is admittedly arbitrary, but it is easily remembered, and makes, I trust, a kind of sense. To make 'rare' mean 'expensive' or even 'rarely obtainable' makes no sense at all that I can see—especially now, when most of these books have found their way into permanent collections. The situation has changed drastically during my lifetime; as an impecunious young teacher I was able to acquire four of the 'excessively rare' titles, and a few of the 'rare' ones; but today these books are not to be had at any price. One can buy only such things as the first edition of *Paradise Lost*. (I have located 321 copies of this in public or institutional libraries, and there must be a considerable number still in private hands.)

Readers dismayed by the bulk of the documentation in my notes are invited to consider what it would have had to be, were not the five volumes of French's *Life Records of John Milton* a convenient reality to which almost every note can, and does, refer. Milton French was one of the most generous and unselfish men I have ever known; he would have been pleased by my wholesale plundering. I have ventured here, however, to supply two things not always to be found in the useful *Life Records*. Unlike French, I try to give the original scholarly source of each piece of information used and try *not* to confuse the reader by listing as well a number of subsequent scholars who have simply repeated the information. (Students missing in my pages this familiar clutter—who really want to know how a fact discovered by Warton, for example, was presented by Todd, Mitford, Hamilton, and Masson—can usually get the references from the *Life Records*. I have deemed this iteration irrelevant unless something important has been added.) My second contribution must be phrased more carefully, lest it be misunderstood. French, superb as he was at discovering and at transcribing meticulously, was sometimes poor at interpreting his facts, and did not always see the implications of his own discoveries. This I have tried to remedy, but in a grateful, not disdainful, way. My debt to French is almost overwhelming, yet I have tried not to be overwhelmed.

The four most valuable sources of Milton biography are Milton's autobiographical statements, a life by his nephew Edward Phillips (1694), a life by an anonymous biographer (not published until 1902), and some untidy notes made *c.* 1681–2 by John Aubrey (not published until 1813). The last two sources were the basis of the early, influential, but largely derivative life by Anthony à Wood (1691). Phillips and Wood were, in turn, the bases of early lives by John Toland (1698) and Jonathan Richardson (1734), neither of whom could add much of great significance. The first attempt at a scholarly biography, indicating sources of data, was a prefatory life by Thomas Birch (1738, revised 1753). Birch and Thomas Newton (1749) were the last biographers who gleaned and published information received by themselves or others from the poet's widow, daughter, and granddaughter.

Subsequent writers have built on these, adding, correcting, confirming, reinterpreting, and, for the most part, filling in background on Milton's friends and acquaintances, the subjects of his poetry and prose, and the nature of his public life. Thomas Warton began this important supplementation as an annotator of the minor poems (1785, revised 1791) and found the records of Milton's oral will. Henry John Todd continued this process (1801, 1809 ff.), aided eventually by the discovery of many official records of Milton's activities as Secretary for Foreign Languages (1826 edition, revised 1842). David Masson wrote an exhaustive six-volume biography (1859–80, Volume 1 revised 1881), which included a detailed history of the Age of Milton. While this was in progress, Alfred Stern published his two-volume *Milton und seine Zeit* (1877–9). The only scholar who succeeded in adding appreciably to these two accounts, the late J. Milton French, did not essay a biography but collected instead, in five volumes, *The Life Records of Milton* (1949–58).

The hundreds of others who have written biographies have rarely been able to add more than a few new facts. Their contribution, when they have made one, has usually been interpretation of facts already familiar. Many of them have written to express their disapproval of Milton's political and/or religious views, and some, like Dr. Johnson, have gone beyond this to exhibit dislike of what they assume to be the man's character and personality. Reaction to such bias has produced some stained-glass biographies, written to praise and to defend.

Lest they seem to have been overlooked here and in later documentation (where derivative scholarship is deliberately omitted), I may mention some of the more significant or influential biographers in addition to those already named. The seventeenth century saw a biographical account by Pierre Bayle (1697) and brief notices of Milton by Edward Phillips (1669, 1675), Gerard Langbaine (1691), and others. The eighteenth century had biographies by Elijah Fenton (1725, often reprinted), Pierre Costar (1726, 1749), Louis Racine (1755), Joseph Towers (1769), Dr. Johnson (written in six weeks early in 1779, often reprinted), and William Hayley (1796). Among the many nineteenth-century biographers were Charles Symmons (1806, 1810), John Mitford (1832, revised 1851), Joseph Ivimey (1833), William Carpenter (1836), Cyrus R. Edmonds (1851), Edwin Paxton Hood (1852), Thomas Keightley (1855), E. de Guerle (1868), Mark Pattison (1879, often reprinted), Richard Garnett (1890), and William P. Trent (1899). Twentieth-century biographers of Milton include Sir Walter Raleigh (1900), John Bailey (1915), Denis Saurat (1925, 1944), E. M. W. Tillyard (1930, 1949), Dora Neill Raymond (1932), Rose Macaulay (1934), Hilaire Belloc (1935), Paul Phelps Morand (1939), F. E. Hutchinson (1946), James Holly Hanford (1949), Emile Saillens (1959, translated 1964), and Douglas Bush (1964).

A number of scholars have made contributions to Milton biography in books on other but allied matters. Examples are *John Milton the Elder and His Music* by Ernest Brennecke, Jr. (1938), Willa McClung Evans's *Henry Lawes* (1941), and Donald C. Dorian's *The English Diodatis* (1950). We have also had books containing some of the ingredients of biography: important examples are Francis Peck's erratic *New Memoirs of the Life* (1740), Joseph Hunter's *Milton: A Sheaf of Gleanings* (1850), John F. Marsh's *Papers Connected with the Affairs of Milton and His Family* (1851), W. D. Hamilton's *Original Papers Illustrative of the Life and Writings of John Milton* (1859), Samuel L. Sotheby's eccentric *Ramblings in the Elucidation of the Autographs of Milton* (1861), John S. Smart's indispensable edition of the *Sonnets* (1921), David H. Stevens's *Milton Papers* (1927), and J. Milton French's *Milton in Chancery* (1939). There is another group of books important to our understanding of Milton's intellectual development, the most valuable of which are Sigmund Spaeth's *Milton's Knowledge of Music* (1913, 1963), Don M. Wolfe's *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (1941), Maurice Kelley's *This Great Argument* (1941), Arthur Barker's *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (1942, 1956), Donald L. Clark's *John Milton at St. Paul's School* (1948), Kester Svendsen's *Milton and Science* (1956), and Harris F. Fletcher's *The Intellectual Development of*

*John Milton* (1956– ). Finally, there have been almost countless essays or articles concerned with details of Milton biography; probably the most important or influential have been those by Hyde Clarke (1859), Colonel J. L. Chester (1868), James Holly Hanford (1921 and 1925), and B. A. Wright (1931–2). These will be discussed in due course.

The many autobiographical passages in Milton's prose and poetry are most conveniently and most reliably collected by John S. Diekhoff in *Milton on Himself* (1939). This is a far better edition than the earlier attempts by J. G. Graham (1872) and Henry Corson (1899). The central example of sustained autobiography, from Milton's *Defensio Secunda* (1654), was not used by Aubrey, but all the other early biographers paraphrased it and to some extent elaborated it. Both its emphases and its omissions are explainable in terms of its defensive, public purpose. Rightly understood, it is a primary source of great importance. Other, scattered passages of autobiography and opinion have been usefully collected by Ida Langdon to reveal *Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1924).

Turning back to our other three primary biographical sources, I may offer here a few generalizations pertinent to my present attempt at biography.

John Aubrey (1626–97) is an undisciplined reporter; when he is not largely anecdotal, his approach is journalistic. He has no direct knowledge of Milton (Masson and others were mistaken about this), but he goes to some persons who do, and he asks good questions. Rightly sceptical about some of the answers he records, he is also conscientious and persistent about getting precise data on Milton's birth and death. His note-taking, however, though more systematic than it at first seems, is indiscriminate; he jots down almost anything people are prompted to tell him, and occasionally even hands them his paper, allowing them to write their proffered comments. Always interesting, his notes are reliable only to the extent that his different informants really knew what they were talking about. His scraps of information can have no other validity; we were never meant to see them; they were scribbled to be winnowed by Anthony à Wood, who chose to ignore a great many of them.

The notes discarded (for whatever reasons) by Wood did not get into the main stream of Milton biography until after 1813, when Aubrey's 'Minutes of Lives' were first published. Since then, he has been often cited as an authority on Milton, which he was not. But Milton's widow was, as were Edward Phillips and Christopher Milton, and we may believe what Aubrey reports their telling him, except when they are obviously repeating what they, too, had heard and could not have known at first hand, and except when they are trying hard to put Milton (or themselves) in the best possible light. Aubrey was charmingly ingenuous and uncritical about such matters. He permits the widow to exaggerate her late husband's precocity. He even permits Phillips to add a marginal note to inform posterity that he, Phillips, was the 'chief amanuensis' in the composition of *Paradise Lost*.

Edward Phillips (1630–96?) does not make this claim in his own biography of his uncle, which is an extraordinarily valuable document for the periods about which he could write from first-hand knowledge. He lived with Milton as a student during the years 1640–6, and afterwards, he tells us, paid him 'frequent visits to the last'. But there are big gaps in his knowledge, and some of his most tantalizing testimony is recollection, at the age of sixty-four, of happenings encountered at the tender age of twelve or fifteen. Moreover, he is extraordinarily careless about dates; he mentions only four in his entire biography, and three of them are wrong. On the other hand, as a visitor 'from time to time' he recalls most of Milton's many residences, and as an occasional amanuensis he writes revealingly of a number of Milton's compositions, published and unpublished. He is our sole source for a number of alleged facts; one wishes that he inspired more confidence as an historian. He made a living as a hack writer, and absorbed but little of his uncle's scholarly spirit. He evidently inserted a good many afterthoughts into a first draft of his life of Milton, with resultant confusion of both syntax and chronology. As my notes will indicate, he made many statements that are demonstrably mistaken. We must treat with caution, therefore, others on which we cannot confirm his accuracy. He is an indispensable, yet too often undependable, witness.

The anonymous biography, written between 1676 (it refers to the printed letters of state) and 1691 (when it was used by Wood), was clearly intended for publication; it has three paragraphs of preamble, appealing to 'the impartial reader', and later states: 'But that this age is insensible of the great obligations it has to him is too apparent in that he has no better a pen to celebrate his memory.' Since the life is short, and in English, it was probably meant to preface an edition of one of Milton's English works. But which? And how, unpublished, did it come to Anthony à Wood's hands, with Wood feeling free to use it, even distort it, without acknowledgement? Most important of all, who was its author?

From what he was able to write about Milton, we may confidently infer a number of things about this biographer. He had served as one of Milton's amanuenses; he can even recall what the poet said when an amanuensis was late in arriving. He was almost certainly Milton's student during the years 1644–7; he can name four of the other students, and he seems to have known the poet's father. He is most knowledgeable about Milton's life in the periods 1644–7, 1649–55, 1660, and 1670. He had seen the then unpublished *De Doctrina Christiana*, and alone among biographers knows of an unfinished and unpublished Greek thesaurus. He had visited Milton's house in Petty France (1652–60); he remembers that it 'had a door into the Park'; and he also knows about the 'large house' in Barbican

(1645–7). He is the only early biographer able to tell us that Milton's grandfather had 'an estate of £500 a year at Stanton St. John in Oxfordshire'; that Milton 'procured relief' for Spenser and Davenant during the interregnum; that Milton was arrested shortly after the Restoration; that he was later invited 'to employ his pen' on behalf of the new government, and was consulted by an eminent member of the House of Lords on the Lord Roos affair (1670).

He is clearly mistaken about certain matters. For example, he connects Mary Powell's return with the surrender of Oxford in June 1646 (when her family joined her in London; meanwhile, pregnant, she was living with the mother-in-law of Milton's brother Christopher). If we may credit Phillips's testimony on these matters, the anonymous biographer did not realize that, even before blindness, Milton had begun work on *Paradise Lost* (as a drama), on the *De Doctrina*, and on his Latin thesaurus. But like Phillips, and unlike Aubrey and Wood, he did not know that Peter Du Moulin had publicly acknowledged (1670) authorship of the *Clamor* (1652) which Milton had stubbornly attributed to Alexander More. Some of the anonymous writer's omissions may be further clues to his identity. He speaks of Mrs. Anne Agar as 'his sister Phillips'. There is no mention of Andrew Marvell or Christopher Milton by name, no suggestion that Milton had a son by his first wife (1651–2) and a daughter by his second (1657–8), no word about John Phillips's *Responsio* (1651–2), or Milton's four pamphlets of 1659–60, or *Of True Religion* (1673), the *Epistolæ* (1674), and the *History of Moscovia* (1682).

Edward S. Parsons, who first published the anonymous biography, thought it might be the work of Dr. Nathan Paget, who died in January 1679. Helen Darbishire, in her edition of *The Early Lives of Milton* (London, 1932), argued at length for John Phillips as the author. Few students of Milton have been willing to accept either attribution; Parsons made an elaborate rebuttal of Darbishire in *PMLA*, L (1935), 1057–64. On the basis of the evidence above, as well as spelling and similarity of handwriting (see my note in *TLS*, 13 September 1957, p. 547), I believe that Cyriack Skinner (1627–1700), 'scholar to John Milton' (so Aubrey), was the biographer. He was evidently Milton's student before 31 July 1647, when he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn at the age of nineteen. He had 'got near' Milton by May 1654 and 'frequently visited' him; Milton addressed two sonnets to him *c.* 1654. He was helping Milton financially in May 1660, shortly before the Restoration, and he married two months later, on 28 July. He was a friend of Andrew Marvell, who, before 18 May 1675 had promised Aubrey to write 'minutes' of Milton's life for Anthony à Wood. That Marvell's promise was unfulfilled is clear from Aubrey's notes of 1681–2, but before his death in 1678 Marvell may have persuaded Skinner, as an older friend of Milton, to take on the assignment. Wood's life of Milton mentions Cyriack Skinner but confuses him (thanks to

Aubrey) with Daniel Skinner; it would seem that he did not know the author of the manuscript biography which he followed so confidently. How it came into his hands is still a mystery. He writes as though 'most' of his data came from Aubrey ('my friend'), and, indeed, the material of his *first draft* may have done so. But he obviously regarded the anonymous biography as in many respects more authoritative than Aubrey's notes—and he was right. It has one peculiarity especially meriting our notice: it is the only early life of Milton which fails to mention the man whom Edward Phillips, in listing Milton's 'particular friends', puts 'above all', Cyriack Skinner.

# Acknowledgements

A work like this, early chosen and finished late, owes much to many, at many different periods and in many different ways—for inspiration or encouragement, for direct help on specific points or valuable criticism of parts of the manuscript, for invaluable assistance in libraries or archives. Some of those whom I should most like to thank publicly are now dead—J. Milton French, C. F. Harrold, David Nichol Smith, Arthur Woodhouse, James A. Work. Let my indebtedness be simply recorded. Trusting not to associate them with any of my unorthodox views, I must also acknowledge my general indebtedness to, and great affection and admiration for, such fellow Miltonians as Douglas Bush, Allan H. Gilbert, James Holly Hanford, Merritt Y. Hughes, and Bernard A. Wright. With most of these fine scholars I have corresponded profitably through the years; with some of them I have had many a convivial argument. My more specific indebtedness to a few other friends, and to nearly a dozen former students, is reported in my notes. Among scholars in other fields who have criticized large parts of the manuscript, to my great benefit, are William Charvat, John H. Fisher, Mary E. Gaither, J. L. N. O'Loughlin, Francis Lee Utley, Harold R. Walley, and J. H. Wilson. Both Ohio State University and Indiana University have generously provided me with secretarial help or research assistants at several critical points of composition or research. The writing of the final draft was made possible by a Guggenheim Fellowship, plus a Fulbright research grant, plus a sabbatical year granted by Indiana University. In proofreading I had the help of my good friends, Agnes Elpers, Mary E. Gaither, and the late B. Q. Morgan, in addition to the remarkably perceptive readers of the Clarendon Press. The Columbia University Press generously gave me permission to quote freely from its great edition of Milton. It is true to life, as well as customary in acknowledgement pages, to say that I owe the greatest debt of all to my wife. If she still likes Milton after this is published, after thirty years of living with it, it will be a wonder.

# Contents

## VOLUME I

PREFACE v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xvii

### PART ONE: FORMAL EDUCATION

1. CHILDHOOD, 1608–1625 3
2. CAMBRIDGE, 1625–1629 23
3. CAMBRIDGE, 1629–1632 55

### PART TWO: SELF-EDUCATION

4. HAMMERSMITH, 1632–1635 119
5. HORTON, 1635–1638 145
6. ITALY, 1638–1639 169

### PART THREE: CITIZENSHIP

7. LONDON, 1639–1642 185
8. SEPARATION, 1642–1645 226
9. RECONCILIATION, 1645–1648 290

### PART FOUR: PUBLIC SERVICE

10. SECRETARYSHIP, 1649–1652 345
11. SELF DEFENCE, 1652–1656 412
12. CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, 1656–1660 480

### PART FIVE: PARADISE LOST AND REGAINED

13. RESTORATION, 1660–1663 567
14. REVIVAL, 1663–1669 588
15. LAST DAYS, 1669–1674 606
16. EPILOGUE 645

## VOLUME II · NOTES

INTRODUCTION 667

ABBREVIATIONS 669

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| CHAPTER 1 | 675 | CHAPTER 9 | 900 |
| 2 | 723 | 10 | 945 |
| 3 | 743 | 11 | 1010 |
| 4 | 779 | 12 | 1048 |
| 5 | 798 | 13 | 1079 |
| 6 | 818 | 14 | 1100 |
| 7 | 835 | 15 | 1118 |
| 8 | 858 | 16 | 1157 |

APPENDIX 1: Milton's Publications, 1628–1700, in the order of their appearance, and with the number of surviving copies located in public, institutional, or private libraries. 1205

APPENDIX 2: Surviving copies of seventeenth-century editions of Milton located in public or institutional libraries. 1209

INDEX AND FINDING-LIST 1215

# List of Plates

## VOL. I

Milton as a student at Cambridge (*in colour*). By courtesy of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, London *Frontispiece*

Milton at the age of 10. By courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York *facing page* 8

The Marshall 'Portrait', 1645. By courtesy of the Curators of the Bodleian Library, Oxford " 288

## VOL. II

Flyleaf of Milton's Bible. Handwriting of the poet and of Jeremy Picard. By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum *Frontispiece*

## PART ONE

# FORMAL EDUCATION

# 1. Childhood, 1608–1625

A family that is undistinguished in the world may find encouragement in the fabled or faded eminence of remote ancestors. The sixteenth-century Miltons, for example, evidently told their children that they came of an ancient stock whose seat was formerly a town of Milton (in Berkshire, or Buckinghamshire, or Oxfordshire), where monuments in 'Milton Church' still testified to past glories. Unfortunately, one of the family took the wrong side in the Wars of the Roses and, so the story went, lost his entire estate—except what he held by his wife. Ever since this qualified calamity, the Miltons had been respectable, worthy people, hopeful of better things.[1]

The family tradition had its unromantic point, for better things were wonderfully within reach of many families in the bustling, forward-looking England of Queen Elizabeth. By working hard and exercising thrift, a poor man might achieve great wealth, and sometimes, if his services to the state were sufficient, and if the right persons were favourable, he might be rewarded with knighthood, or even higher honours. A Protestant God, who pronounced Himself glorified by industry and perseverance and probity, had taken under His special protection the emerging middle class. For yeomen, however, and for Roman Catholics of any class, the times held less glowing prospects.

Richard Milton, grandfather of the poet, was a yeoman and a Catholic, who worked a small farm at Stanton St. John, a village on the hills about four miles north-east of Oxford. He may also have been, at one time, an under-ranger or keeper of the adjacent forest of Shotover. We see him dimly now, and unsympathetically, through a few ancient records and the hearsay of later generations. His father, Henry, and perhaps his grandfather before him, had worked this same land and had managed to wrest a bare livelihood from the soil and a few farm animals. Richard's father had died early in 1559, leaving goods inventoried at not quite seven pounds. His mother, Agnes Milton, had died two years later. Surviving them were two or more children, but it was Richard who became master of the household. Eventually, we are told (although *how* we are not told), he had an estate of five hundred pounds a year. Perhaps he married well. In any case, he seems to have been well enough off by 1577 to be assessed three pounds for a subsidy; and five years later, as a substantial member of the little community, he was elected a churchwarden of the Anglican parish.[2]

If this was a tribute to his thrift, it brought considerable embarrassment. Born in the reign of King Henry VIII, Richard Milton was one of many Englishmen who had resented the Reformation. He had lived to see the national temper change with kaleidoscopic swiftness and confusion, from Henry's self-centred denial of Rome, to Somerset and Northumberland's insufferable reforms, to Mary's brief but glorious reign, to Elizabeth's uncertain policies and continued persecution. Like countless others who held fast to the only true religion, Richard conformed outwardly to the communion of the heretical Church of England until events combined to force his recusancy. At the time of the Archdeacon's visitation of Oxford, 11 May 1582, he and another churchwarden of Stanton St. John, John White,[3] were excommunicated; and twice in the year 1601 he was fined sixty pounds for three months of non-attendance at his parish church. Independence of religious thought had become expensive and dangerous. Richard may have died shortly afterwards; we have only these few records of his life; but our last glimpse, in October of 1601, is of a stubborn, embittered old man.[4]

One cause of his bitterness had been the conduct of his own son. John Milton, father of the poet, was born in the latter part of 1562, two years before Shakespeare and Marlowe, a year after Francis Bacon. He was born at a time of plague, when the newer breed of Englishmen were first reading, with wonder and reverence, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. Trained in the true faith at home but exposed to the Protestant heresy in the parish church, the boy had eventually been poisoned by the hellish attitudes of this new and perverse England. His education may have speeded the tragedy, if John Aubrey is right in reporting that he was 'brought up' in the Anglican university of Oxford, at Christ Church. It may well be, as some biographers have suggested, that his Oxford education consisted largely of training as a chorister at Wolsey's college. Although University records tell us nothing of his presence there, Aubrey's unqualified statement, the proximity of Stanton St. John to Oxford, John's later musical talents, and the fact that two manuscripts containing his music are to be found today in the Christ Church library, all make the inference plausible. In any case, one day Richard Milton was horrified to discover his son reading an English Bible in his room. A quarrel ensued; the boy proved a match for his parent in stubbornness. The irresistible force met the immovable object; Milton clashed with Milton. Young John was disinherited, and left Oxfordshire for London in search of a livelihood.[5]

Richard Milton remained, dark and unforgiving, at Stanton St. John, and as far as we know the son never saw his father again. Milton the poet never mentioned his grandfather in writing, and his brother Christopher, if he (as we are usually told) became a Catholic himself, apparently could not remember the old recusant's Christian name when John Aubrey questioned him. But the story of the disinheritance was well known in the family; all of the poet's earliest biographers mention it.[6]

The renegade Milton was perhaps twenty or twenty-one when the clash with his father took place. If so, he came to London at another time of fearful plague. Fortunately, having fled Egypt for the Promised Land, he was taken care of by some sympathetic friend or relative. A scrivener, James Colbron, soon persuaded the young man to enter his profession. The apprenticeship evidently began about 1583, for by 1590 or thereabouts Milton was active in business.[7]

The work of a scrivener combined many of the functions of a notary, a copyist, a money-lender, and a contract lawyer. In the 1590's for example, and for three decades later, Milton was receiving money from John Cotton for investment.[8] He seems to have had a number of such regular customers. On 27 February 1600, or not long thereafter, he was admitted to the freedom of the Scriveners Company.[9] By 1601, if not earlier, he had rented a combined house and shop in Bread Street, just off Cheapside, an excellent neighbourhood—'now wholly inhabited by rich merchants', said Stow in 1603. Doing so, he became a member of the parish of All Hallows, Bread Street. Faced with the business necessity of a sign, he called his shop the Spread Eagle, perhaps because this was the traditional insignia of the scriveners. In scattered documents, preserved through accident or design, it is still possible to catch glimpses of his many activities through the first quarter of the new century.[10]

The scrivener Milton was not too absorbed in business affairs to cultivate a lively interest in music. Whatever his previous training and experience had been, by 1601 he was well enough known as a musician to be invited—along with such celebrated artists as Wilbye, Weelkes, Kirbye, Gibbons, Tomkins, Farmer, Mundy, and Bennet—to contribute to a volume collected by Thomas Morley, dedicated to Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, and published as a tribute to the ageing Queen Elizabeth. The volume, published in 1601, was entitled *Madrigales: The Triumphes of Oriana*. Milton's contribution, 'Fair Orian in the morn', is his only surviving madrigal; but its presence in this once-famous collection suggests that he had composed others and that his talents were known.[11]

In 1600, or earlier, the scrivener-musician met, courted, and married Sara Jeffrey, elder daughter of Paul and Ellen Jeffrey of St. Swithin's parish, London. His bride's father, a merchant-tailor, had died early in 1583, about the time of Milton's arrival in the city. The place and time of the marriage have not been discovered; the event may have occurred as early as 1590, when Sara was about eighteen and John was beginning business as a scrivener.[12] We know only that a child of theirs was buried at All Hallows on 12 May 1601, having died before it could be baptized.[13] Although the names are not recorded in the All Hallows register, it seems likely that several other children were born to them before 1608. We know, however, of only one who survived, a daughter, christened Anne. The place and time of her birth have not been found; perhaps she was born when Sara Milton was visiting relatives in Essex. Sara's younger sister, Margaret Jeffrey, lived at Newton Hall, Great Dunmow, in Essex, until she married William Truelove of Hatfield Peverel in the same county, in 1602. The marriage allegation, dated 28 August, included John Milton's attestation of the consent of his mother-in-law to the match.[14]

In the spring of 1608 Milton and his wife were expecting another baby. He was about forty-six years of age; she, about thirty-six. As summer came, and autumn, who can doubt that the two of them prayed God for a son?

* * *

Their son, John Milton, was born at half past six o'clock in the morning of Friday, 9 December 1608. His birthplace was almost certainly a bedroom on the second floor of a tenement called the Spread Eagle, in a large house called the White Bear, on the east side of Bread Street in London, a little south of Cheapside. He was baptized in the parish church of All Hallows, Bread Street, five days before Christmas.[15]

To his devout, middle-aged parents Christmas was a memorable season in that year. Unto them a son was born. Gratefully, they dedicated their child to God's ministry.[16]

They knew that the Lord needed devoted servants; England had been a sinful land since the turn of the century, and the divine anger had been heavy upon them all. Popish idolatry, the sin most offensive in God's eyes, was on the increase; and every place, country and city alike, was horribly defiled. These sober views, doubtless accepted by his own parishioners, were currently expressed in a book by Richard Stock, the curate of All Hallows. With daring candour, Stock even blamed King James by implication, urging that his Majesty's lenity in these matters be turned into a just severity. The book had been registered for publication two days before the boy Milton was born.[17]

We may be sure that John's childhood was as happy as a comfortable environment and kindly, middle-class parents could make it. His home was near the busy heart of England's largest city. The Miltons occupied commodious apartments with rooms on five floors of a big house in which at least seven other tenants had shops or living quarters.[18] The building known as the White Bear was leased by Eton College to a wealthy mercer, Baptist Hicks, from whom the Miltons had a sub-lease.[19] The entrance to the scrivener's little shop, marked on Bread Street by a pictorial sign of a spread eagle, was in a narrow hallway about seventy-five feet down from Cheapside. At the end of the hallway were stairs leading to the first floor, with its wainscoted hall and parlour, its kitchen, buttery, and little counting-house. The kitchen and parlour had large fireplaces and generous, projecting windows overlooking Bread Street. On the second floor was a large, wainscoted bedroom with a nine-foot ceiling (probably the poet's birthplace), another bedroom in the front of the house, and, between them, a lodging chamber, perhaps for the nurse or maid. Three other chambers were on the floors above, two of them added (or newly fitted) before October 1617. Here the servants and apprentices slept. Young John's room, when he was a schoolboy, may have been the large, wainscoted one on the third floor, with windows looking east to near-by Bow Church and south to All Hallows, Queenhithe, the Thames, and Bankside beyond.

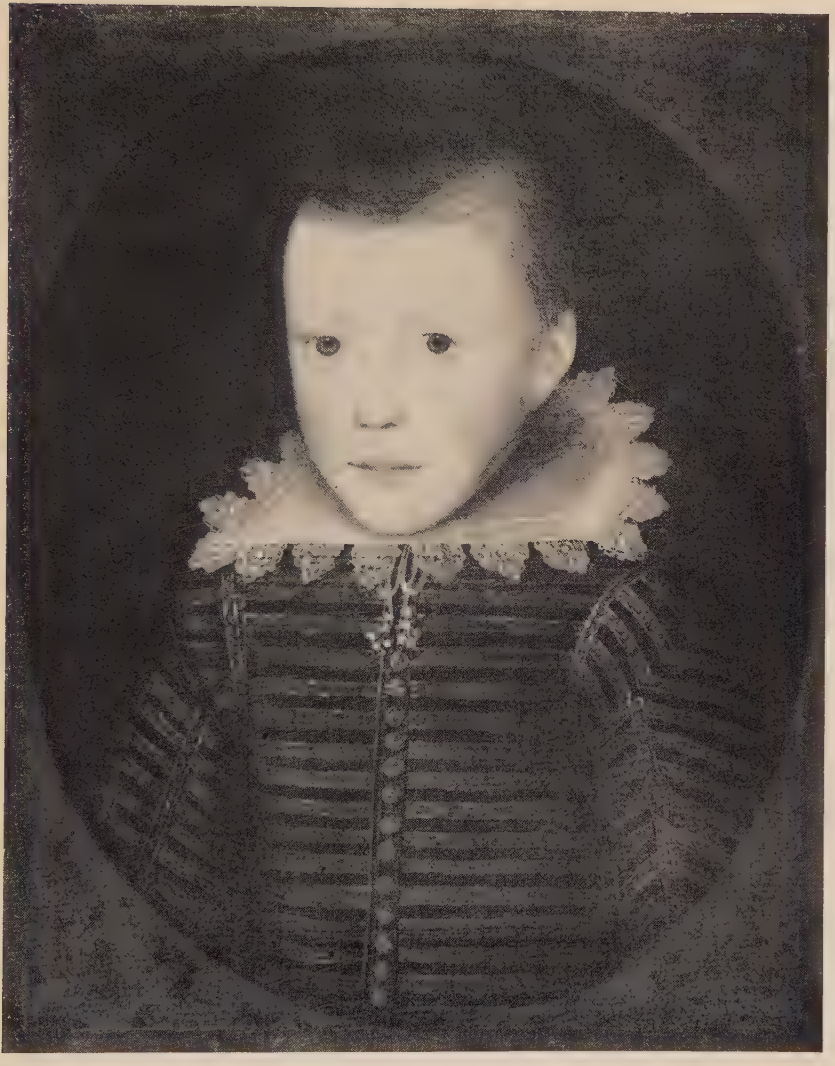
John Milton was born into neither poverty nor riches. As the son of a prospering, respected citizen, he must have played on an ordinary street with the boys and girls of ordinary neighbours, and twice on Sundays sat stiffly in church alongside these children, accepting Christianity as a living religion. Love and understanding surrounded him. From an older sister and, soon, a younger brother he could learn the lessons of give and take, and in his teens he was destined to have a trusted friend. If we leave grandly unexplored the mystery of natural gifts, and do not try to set a date for the troubling sense of isolation that comes in time to the gifted ones, John's childhood may be said to have differed from that of most of his contemporaries in a single important respect: when his devoted parents early dedicated him to God's service, they had the good sense to instil in their son an enduring love of learning.[20]

The parish of All Hallows, Bread Street, the first social group of which the boy became conscious, was composed of hard-working, pious businessmen and their families. Most of these men were substantial merchants, more than half of them dealers in cloth. At least eight families of the parish were lesser gentry, able to boast coats of arms. These were the kind of thrifty, ambitious people who were beginning to send their sons to the universities. One of them was John Venn, silkman, who eventually became a Member of Parliament and signed the death warrant of a king. In the seventy or so houses of the parish lived about fifty boys and girls within two years of John Milton's own age, and among them he presumably found his first playmates. Upon their known virtue and native intelligence he was later to rest his adult faith in a new Reformation.[21]

These facts of environment are more important to our understanding of Milton's development than are the few events of his childhood which can be documented and dated. The boy was two years old when his grandmother, Mrs. Ellen Jeffrey, died. The only grandparent he ever knew, she had apparently lived for a time with her daughter and son-in-law, and was buried in All Hallows Church on 26 February 1611.[22] In the next year, when John was three, a baby sister was christened Sara, after her mother, on 15 July, and was buried on 6 August.[23] If the boy carried into mature life no recollection of these domestic tragedies, or of the nation's mourning over the death of Prince Henry in 1612, there were losses which he certainly recalled. There was his sister Tabitha, who was baptized on 30 January 1614, and who was buried on 3 August of the following year.[24] (In seventeenth-century London only one child in ten survived to his fifth year.) An uncle, William Truelove, died in 1618.[25] There were other uncles, aunts, and cousins, of course, who were married, born, or buried during John's childhood; and we can suppose that when his mother's relative, Hester Jeffrey, married William Blackborough on 9 February 1619 at St. Peter's, Cornhill, young John accompanied his parents to witness the ceremony.[26] His mother had relatives who lived in Essex, and there were surely visits to and fro. One of Milton's earliest biographers learned that about 1619 'his schoolmaster then was a Puritan in Essex, who cut his hair short'.[27] The name of this Essex schoolmaster and the location of the school have eluded us, but we may still see the pious haircut in a portrait which the father commissioned of his ten-year-old progeny.

The artist, tradition holds, was Cornelius Janssen, a London-born painter of Dutch ancestry. That a scrivener would engage an artist to do his son's portrait tells us something about his tastes, something about his prosperity (he then had at least four apprentices working in his shop), but even more about his growing pride in his son. The portrait may also tell us something about the influence of the boy's mother. First one notices the delicate, rather wistful face, the pink and white complexion, the inquiring eyes, the closely cropped auburn hair. Then one observes the clothes: the tight-fitting black doublet with narrow gold braid, the elegant sleeves, the dainty collar with frill of lace. The mother who dressed her son in such a charming costume may have surpassed her neighbours in piety and charitable works, but she was also an Elizabethan woman, a merchant-tailor's daughter, who loved rich and beautiful things.[28]

It is a pity that we know so little about Sara Milton. Her son tells us only that she was a most virtuous (*probatissima*) mother, known for her charity to the poor; an anonymous biographer of the son adds that she was 'a prudent, virtuous wife'; her grandson, Edward Phillips, who was six when she died, called her 'a woman of incomparable virtue and goodness'; John Aubrey learned that she 'had very weak eyes, and used spectacles presently after she was thirty years old.'[29] That is all. The scrivener was able to read without spectacles at eighty-four; and it is sad that we must suspect his wife of passing on poor eyesight to her talented son. Milton's very reticence about his mother may, however, have implications not beyond our conjecture. One may trace to her unsung influence, perhaps, a certain fastidiousness, a certain refinement and delicacy of taste, which were to distinguish her famous son in later life. Perhaps Milton as a boy spent too much time in the company of a doting mother and an older sister. He grew up to be always careful of dress and speech, hypersensitive concerning his personal integrity, nice of manners and of morals. He was



Milton at the Age of 10

twenty-eight and unmarried when his mother died; he was thirty-three when he finally found himself a wife.

Another important influence upon the boy Milton, difficult to gauge but dangerous to ignore, was that of the parish church. When Richard Stock became rector of All Hallows, Bread Street, on 20 March 1611, he took his parish duties seriously. Moreover, he was in the habit of assisting his parishioners in writing wills and handling estates, so that his relations with the scrivener must have been frequent. Besides preaching twice on Sunday (he demanded strict observance of the Sabbath), he catechized the children of his parish during the week, boys and girls on alternate days. He believed firmly in the religious education of the young, and even evolved certain pedagogical methods, the most interesting of which was his practice of making the stupid listen while the clever children recited, but never permitting them to recite competitively. He urged his flock to read the Bible continuously, and scolded them when he felt they were neglecting this Christian duty: 'Your books are seldom in hand but when you go to church; they lie in your houses covered with dust.' His sermons were popular and plain, never flashy; he used homely illustrations, abjured rhetorical ornaments and learned allusions; he was a preacher, not an orator. What eloquence he possessed was rough and direct. His education had been cut short by circumstances; he confessed himself to be unusually slow to absorb what he read. Instead of impressing his congregation with his erudition, therefore, he spoke straight to their practical needs, recommending that they read, not only the Bible, but also the English commentaries of Bilson, Fulke, Willet, Greenham, Rogers, and Perkins. Recognizing the usefulness of this approach, Baron William Knollys of Rotherfield Greys had, in 1606, asked him to translate into English ('which hath his propriety of speech, as well as the Latin') William Whitaker's *Answer to the Ten Reasons of Edmund Campian the Jesuit.* Thus Stock, without the intellectual powers of the more celebrated preachers of his day, struck a vicarious blow at the iniquities of Rome.[30]

He knew his own limitations and, with shrewd common sense, turned them to his advantage. He developed a reputation for bluntness, for simple candour, and occasionally mentioned this reputation with disingenuous pleasure. His own parishioners knew his 'use to be very sparing in praising of the dead' at funerals; and though many probably resented this perverted display of honesty, they accepted it as part of the man's character. Although he was for some years chaplain to Lord Knollys and was on friendly terms with the Harington family and Sir Henry Yelverton, he always exercised to the full his ministerial freedom of speech in criticizing moral laxity among the aristocracy. As Thomas Gataker admiringly declared: 'As for his candour in reproving of sin, and that even to the faces of the greatest, both in public and private, when occasion required it, I doubt not but there are many here that are well able to testify, and some accidents made it to be more publicly known than his desire was that it should have been.'[31]

What Stock judgements young John Milton carried into his mature life we can infer only in the most general terms. Certainly the preacher's diatribes against Roman Catholicism left their impression. Perhaps the rough candour, the outspoken honesty that sometimes characterized the pastor of All Hallows, helped to mould the boy's attitudes. Stock's practice—against considerable criticism—of citing the Church Fathers for confirmation and illustration of the Bible may likewise have proved an influence. In any case, there can be little doubt that the Sunday sermons, the triweekly catechisms, the ministerial visits to the Milton home all played an important part in making John a normal, God-fearing, Jesuit-hating, Bible-reading Christian. Stock was a Puritan, labouring within the Church of England to purify it, seeking to regain an apostolic simplicity of worship and emphasizing the essential inwardness of religious experience, and this view young Milton thoroughly absorbed. His own copy of the Bible was a 1612 edition, perhaps given him by his parents on his fourth birthday, and its diction, its imagery, its rhythms, early became a part of him.[32]

Perhaps in 1611, when Stock became rector of All Hallows and when John was only two, an event occurred which suggests that the scrivener's son was never to become a Puritan in a narrow, dehumanized sense. The details are lost, and the event itself we learn about from two obviously garbled versions; but as the story comes to us in both instances from members of the family, we must not ignore it. The scrivener's grandson, Edward Phillips, was told by the poet himself that Milton senior 'composed an *In Nomine* of forty parts, for which he was rewarded with a gold medal and chain by a Polish prince to whom he presented it.' John Aubrey, having talked with the scrivener's second son, Christopher, wrote: 'I have been told that the father composed a song of fourscore parts for the Landgrave of Hesse, for which [his] highness sent a medal of gold or a noble present.' Both the medal and the composition have long since disappeared. Whether the latter was of two- or four-score parts, it represented a real achievement, a musical *tour de force* which only a mature musician could have produced. We do know that on 23 June 1611 Prince Otto, son of the Landgrave Maurice of Hesse-Kassel, visited England as a suitor for the hand of Princess Elizabeth. He was entertained royally and, since his noble father was known as a skilful composer, music naturally had its part in the festivities. He returned to Germany without the Princess but with, we may conjecture, a phenomenal composition presented by a London citizen—a man of nearly fifty who was a scrivener by trade, yet talented to an extraordinary degree.[33]

There is additional evidence that John's father was actively interested in music during his son's formative years. *The Teares or Lamentations of a Sorrowfull Soule*, published early in 1613, was a lugubrious collection of penitential verses and rimed paraphrases of the Psalms written by Sir William Leighton while in prison for debt. In 1614, a sumptuous folio edition of this was produced, with not altogether doleful music provided by the author and by nineteen of the foremost musicians of the age. Most generous were Milton and William Byrd, who contributed four compositions each.[34] To approximately this same period belongs the writing of probably six unpublished songs by Milton which one Thomas Myriell included in his collection of music called 'Tristitiæ Remedium', a book ready for publication in 1616, but never printed. Doubtless its bulk made the cost of printing prohibitive; Myriell tried to collect, from books and manuscripts, the most distinctive vocal music of his time. Milton is one of thirty-six English composers, and is represented by ten of a total of 192 songs.[35] In the world of music the scrivener was clearly becoming an important figure; and on week-day evenings, while Richard Stock wrinkled his forehead over the meaning of Malachi, the Milton family must often have gathered round the organ and lent cheerful voices to the madrigals from *The Triumphes of Oriana*. Young John, we are told, 'had a delicate, tuneable voice and had good skill: his father instructed him'. This father was 'an ingenious man', both talented and liberal. As one of his grandsons said, admiringly, his business brought 'success suitable to his industry and prudent conduct of his affairs, yet did he not so far quit his own generous and ingenious inclinations as to make himself wholly a slave to the world'.[36]

The scrivener's second son was born about 24 November 1615 and was baptized Christopher on Sunday, 3 December.[37] John was almost exactly seven years older than his brother. The father was about fifty-three when Christopher was born; the mother, in her early forties. There were to be no more children.

In addition to Anne and the two boys, the Milton household included, of course, the various apprentices needed in an ever-prospering business. Presumably beginning their apprenticeships in 1614, William Bower and Richard Milton were made free of the Scriveners Company in 1621. (Richard must have been a relative, named, perhaps, after the old Catholic of Stanton St. John.) James Hodgkinson and Thomas Bower were made free on 29 June 1624. John Hutton was made free in 1628. There were other servants, most of them probably apprentices, who seem never to have become free of the Company.[38] All these young men, who are little more than names to us, were daily companions of the boy John, and one of them, Thomas Bower, eventually became the partner of John's father. All of them serve to remind us that the elder Milton was a successful and prominent scrivener. He held office as an Assistant in the Scriveners Company in 1615 and again in 1622, and as a Steward in 1625.[39]

A well-to-do businessman, concerned with the education of his son and heir, could afford to imitate a fashion among the nobility and employ a private tutor. Perhaps with the aid of Richard Stock (or his friend Thomas Gataker) Milton hired for the training of young John a teacher by the name of Thomas Young, a Scotsman of about thirty, married, and come to London to improve his fortunes. He was the son of William Young, vicar of Luncarty, Pitcairne, and Redgorton, an energetic and vocal Presbyterian. Thomas himself had matriculated from St. Leonard's College in the University of St. Andrews in 1602, and had graduated M.A. in July 1606. Like other Scotsmen he had come to England in the wake of a Scottish king, but the English Church offered scant hope for advancement to anyone of Presbyterian persuasion. Tutoring the eager, intelligent son of a prosperous scrivener was a temporary expedient. The lessons began in 1618 at the latest—possibly a few years before this date. By 1620 Young seems to have been beneficed near Ware, about twenty miles north of London. He may, however, have combined tutoring with this ministerial post.[40]

Presumably the tutor visited his pupil at hours set for teaching, and John meanwhile studied and tried his hand at Latin composition. We know almost nothing of what was taught; but if the boy revelled in classical studies under Young—as he afterwards acknowledged poetically—it seems a fair guess that the tutor invested the Muses with appropriate warnings against Sabbath-breaking, Episcopacy, and the whore of Babylon. No verses from this early period survive, but an early biographer reports (on the word of Milton's widow) that at the age of ten John Milton was already a poet. In any case, we may be sure that John's parents looked on with pride and interest, as through 1619 the studies continued. It was in 1619 that the portrait of the youthful scholar was painted.[41]

(In 1619, while a son of Scotland was in London, helping to educate a new master of English verse, Ben Jonson was in Scotland, ruthlessly pigeon-holing English poetry under the critical eye of William Drummond. In 1619 George Herbert was elected Public Orator at Cambridge University; Richard Burbage died, and those who had known the Elizabethan theatre at its exciting best, mourned the passing of a great actor; the 'bad quartos' of Shakespeare's plays were on sale in London; and a famous teacher and poetic historian, Samuel Daniel, died shortly after the Queen who had discharged him from her service.)

However pleasant and stimulating the task may have been, tutoring young Milton was an impermanent and not very remunerative job for a married man who was, after all, trained for the ministry. In 1620, therefore, Thomas Young learned with interest that William Loe, pastor of the English church at Hamburg, was returning to England and that his post would fall vacant. The merchant-adventurers of Hamburg had been granted freedom of divine service in 1611, and their first pastor, John Wing, seems to have been installed in 1612. Having endured the isolation for six years, he was succeeded by Loe. Two years later, after having caused a careful extract of the church register to be made, dated 24 April 1620, Loe decided to go home. Milton's tutor, recognizing an opportunity which seemed denied him in England, sought the post and received it.[42]

It was probably in the autumn of 1620 that Thomas Young, accompanied by his wife Rebecca, sailed eastward for Hamburg to look over the prospect, find himself a home, and make arrangements for a permanent stay. His case was typical of many English Puritans of the day; in September of this same year, from Plymouth, the good ship *Mayflower* had sailed westward with a boatload of people like Thomas and Rebecca Young, seeking freedom of worship in a new world. They 'passed from Pharian fields to Canaan land, / Led by the strength of the Almighty's hand'.[43]

In the house on Bread Street this turn of affairs may have prompted a decision, not to find another tutor, but to send the boy to a suitable grammar school, where he might be prepared for a university. The school chosen was St. Paul's, only a few minutes' walk from Bread Street, and reputed a careful and godly institution. The record of John's admission there has long since perished; but it was almost certainly late in 1620 or early in 1621, when he was twelve years old, that he began his daily trips down Watling Street to and from the east end of St. Paul's Churchyard, satchel in hand, bent upon new adventures in learning.[44] The school day started at seven in the morning and ended at five in the afternoon, with a two-hour recess at midday for dinner. The one-story, stone building housing the school was in the afternoon shadow of the great cathedral, with its rose window, its pillars and pointed arches, its commanding tower, its 'studious cloisters', its music of organ and choir—and its countless pigeons fluttering overhead. John was at last one of 'Paul's pigeons', as the boys of St. Anthony's had derisively dubbed their rivals. He was growing wings and learning to fly.[45]

Schooldays were happy days for Milton. He studied hard, made friends, and basked in the growing approval of his elders. He was probably admitted at first to one of the classes or forms of the Lower School (the fourth form if he entered in 1620); and who can doubt that he soon aspired to occupy the small desk, higher than the other benches, in which the 'president' or best scholar of each form sat by way of eminence? His healthy thirst for knowledge developed steadily under his new teachers: the high master, Alexander Gill; the surmaster, William Sound;[46] and the under-usher, Alexander Gill, junior. He found unexpected delight in the reading of Caesar and Ovid,[47] and, later, of Sallust, Virgil, Cicero, Horace, Homer, Euripides, Isocrates, Persius, and Juvenal. He enjoyed the requirements of verse and prose composition in Latin and, eventually, in Greek. It is possible to reconstruct with some accuracy the curriculum of the school at the time,[48] but a list of the many authors studied, even when examined thoroughly, tells but part of the story. John read beyond the set books; he began early his lifelong task of self-education. We know that his pleased father permitted the boy to study by candlelight until midnight or later, ordering a maid to sit up with him long after the rest of the household had gone to their beds. The tired eyes and frequent headaches which resulted (wax candles were also burned in the schoolroom during the dark winter months) were danger signals largely unheeded by the teen-age student and his proud parents. John did not need the Latin warning painted on the windows of St. Paul's School: 'Either teach or learn, or leave.' He recognized the fact that his father had 'destined' him for the study of humane letters, and he accepted the challenge with headlong eagerness.[49]

Old Mr. Gill, the high master, was a Renaissance schoolteacher, to whom Greek and Latin were living languages. He had succeeded Richard Mulcaster as head of St. Paul's in 1608, and had since gained a considerable reputation as a forceful and effective pedagogue. The Mercers Company of London, who had managed the school since its foundation by John Colet about 1510, knew that Gill's pupils were thoroughly trained in both Roman eloquence and Christian piety; and the universities, which every year received their share of new Paulines, doubtless welcomed these boys who not only arrived with the ability to compose pure classical Latin in verse or prose, but also, from time to time, exhibited proficiency in Hebrew and other oriental languages. Like Mulcaster (whom he accused of surrendering to the tyrant, custom), Gill had cultivated an interest in spelling reform, and he probably told his classes that German printers like Wynkyn de Worde were responsible for the corruption of English spelling. He expressed this view in his *Logonomia Anglica*, a systematic English grammar written in Latin and published in 1619. His book, which abounds in quotations from recent English poets, also advocated the retention of native English words in preference to Latinisms and Gallicisms. Gill was a learned man, with some entertaining crotchets (he preferred rime to blank verse in drama); but he was also quite capable of introducing his more sensitive students to the beauties of his favourite English poet, Spenser ('our Homer'), or reminding them that modern England had its Anacreon (Sidney), its Juvenal (Withers), its Lucan (Daniel), and its Martial (Harington). A student of prosody, devoted to classical literature yet well read in contemporary verse, he was an admirable guide for a talented boy with poetic aspirations.[50]

When in the Renaissance, do as the Romans do! Such was the impulse felt by Milton and his schoolfellows, who learned to read and write Latin as easily as their native English. John's earliest efforts at versifying were, of course, chiefly aimed at pleasing his teachers and a few friends, and were a perfectly natural product of Italian humanism. He even attempted to compose poetry in Greek. The high master's son, Alexander Gill, junior, took a special interest in him and encouraged his writing. Young Alexander, who was about ten years older than Milton, had graduated M.A. from

Oxford in 1619, and had succeeded Oliver Smythe as under-usher of St. Paul's School in the autumn of 1621, probably after a brief period of teaching under Thomas Farnaby in Cripplegate, London. He had already published a little in miscellanies, and, to his impressionable pupils, he probably seemed an accomplished poet. That Milton admired him greatly, and valued his criticism, is quite clear from subsequent events. Doubtless the boy was shown the Greek verses which Gill had contributed to the *Academiæ Oxoniensis Funebria Sacra* (1619), and he may have seen in manuscript such Latin poems as the one which Gill wrote in celebration of his father's sixtieth birthday, 27 February 1624. The high master and Milton's own father were nearly the same age.[51]

Nathaniel Gill, another son of the high master, was a schoolmate of Milton until about 1623, when he matriculated at Oxford. It is possible to recover the names of still other schoolmates,[52] but so scanty are the records of this period of Milton's life that we know of only one who became a special friend and companion—a boy who also matriculated at Oxford early in 1623 (7 February). This was Charles Diodati, a lively and intelligent lad of about Milton's age, son of a prominent London physician, Dr. Theodore Diodati. Charles's mother was English; his father, though of Italian origin, had been born in Geneva, where his brother Giovanni, the famous theologian, still lived. Charles's home about 1620 was in the near-by parish of St. Mary Magdalen, in Castle Baynard ward; and there can be little doubt that the two young Paulines began early the visiting to and fro which continued during vacations from college and even after both had become men. Milton met Charles's sister, Philadelphia, and his brother John. He may have heard Dr. Diodati describe his youth in Switzerland or his medical studies at the University of Leyden. Certainly he came to regard Charles as his closest, most trusted friend. It seems obvious that Charles's warm and gay disposition supplied a lack in Milton's more quiet temperament—that the two boys complemented each other. As he grew older, Milton tended to idealize their comradeship, leaning upon its strength and security in moods of spiritual loneliness. It evidently began, however, in a mutual enthusiasm for learning. Only two letters from Diodati to Milton have survived—and both are in Greek.[53]

While John made new friends at school, and studied until twelve or one o'clock at night 'as well in voluntary improvements of his own choice as the exact perfecting of his school exercises', his father, the elderly scrivener, not only supervised his two or three apprentices and attended to the demands of his thriving business, but also kept alive his interest in matters literary or musical. An occasional visitor to the Milton home must have been Thomas Myriell, whose six stout manuscript volumes of music, including ten specimens of the scrivener's work, were still unprinted. Another visitor was John Lane, 'a fine old Queen Elizabeth gentleman', whose bulk of unpublished verse rivalled the musical collections of Myriell.

In 1600 Lane had printed a piece of doggerel entitled *Tom Tel-Troth's Message and His Pen's Complaint*, and in 1603 he had presented the unappreciative world with *An Elegy upon the Death of Elizabeth.* Since producing these dubious contributions to Elizabethan poetry, Lane had busied himself with a lengthy continuation of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and an even more laborious continuation of Lydgate's *Guy of Warwick.* The former had inspired 'John Milton, citizen of London, most loving of music', to write as follows to 'his friend J.L.':

> Right well I know that units, eighths, fifths, thirds,
> From discords and chromatics do abhor,
> Though heavenly reason bears with those absurds
> To music's Class, for love's sake, to restore.
> But tell me, Lane, how canst thou this approve,
> That we presume on music without love?

Lane's 'Corrected History of Sir Guy, Earl of Warwick' so charmed the scrivener that he wrote a sonnet of commendation:

> If virtue this be not, what is? Tell quick!
> For childhood, manhood, old age, thou dost write
> Love, war, and lusts quelled by arm heroic,
> Instanced in Guy of Warwick, knighthood's light.
> Heralds' records and each sound antiquary
> For Guy's true being, life, death, eke hast sought,
> To satisfy those which *prævaricari*;
> Manuscript, chronicle, if might be bought;
> Coventry's, Winton's, Warwick's monuments,
> Trophies, traditions delivered of Guy,
> With care, cost, pain, as sweetly thou presents,
> To exemplify the flower of chivalry.
> From cradle to the saddle and the bier,
> For Christian imitation, all are here.

As one critic has said, 'the sonnet is so bad that Lane might have written it himself', but it reveals, nevertheless, the elder Milton's breadth of interests, his admiration for antiquarian research, his view of poetry as delightful teaching, and his personal readiness to try his hand at an unfamiliar art. Lane returned these compliments with an allusion to the musical powers of 'Meltonus', buried in a long poem dated 1621 and entitled 'Triton's Trumpet to the Twelve Months Husbanded and Moralized'. Like so much of Lane's verse this piece remained, mercifully, in manuscript.[54]

The musician-scrivener and his poetaster friend were several times joined in business transactions. On 25 May 1621 they purchased from Dr. Leonard Poe some property near the north end of Gray's Inn Lane, and on 3 April 1622 sold the property to James Kent, barber-surgeon, presumably at a tidy profit.[55] In the words of the scrivener's grandson, this was a period in which 'he managed his grand affair of this world with such prudence and diligence that, by the assistance of divine Providence favouring his honest endeavours, he gained a competent estate, whereby he was enabled to make a handsome provision both for the education and maintenance of his children'.[56]

A very profitable part of his business consisted of making loans, large or small, at eight to ten per cent. interest. Occasionally these loans landed him in legal difficulties. For example, on 9 February 1622 Edward Raymond borrowed £50, at ten per cent., and gave a bond of £100 to John Lane (in trust for Milton), James Ayloffe standing surety. Raymond made his interest payments in August and the following February, but Milton, probably realizing that he was dealing with a bad risk (or that Ayloffe considered his surety invalid after the first six months), in the Hilary term of 1623 turned the debt over to his attorney to collect in the Court of Common Pleas. Raymond, who was an attorney in the same court, begged and obtained a different arrangement, paying £10 on the debt and acknowledging a judgement against him in the Lord Mayor's Court. On 24 June 1623 he made the first of four quarter-day payments of £10, and very shortly thereafter died. Milton sued his estate in vain for the remaining £30, and so John Lane was compelled to bring suit against Ayloffe at common law for the debt. On 1 May 1624 Ayloffe brought a counter-suit in Chancery against both Milton and Lane. Our knowledge of the affair comes from this document and from Milton's answer, dated 10 May and signed by his attorney, Edmund Breres. We do not know the outcome; but these few facts remind us that usury can produce discords as well as pay for the education of a poet.[57]

Because they were considered usurers, and hence 'merciless tigers', scriveners as a class were not popular with the more improvident members of Jacobean society. According to Philip Stubbes, 'the scrivener is the instrument whereby the Devil worketh the frame of this wicked work of usury, he being rewarded with a good fleece for his labour. For first he hath a certain allowance of the archdevil who owns the money, for helping him to such vent for his coin. Secondly, he hath a great deal more usury to himself, of him who borroweth the money, than he alloweth the owner of the money. And thirdly, he hath not the least part for making the writings between them.' This is shrewd comment; other writers describe the scrivener with colourful vituperation. To Wye Saltonstall, for example, he is 'a Christian cannibal that devours men alive. He sits behind a desk like a spider in a cobweb to watch what flies will fall into his net. . . . To conclude, his life is so black that no ink can paint it forth, he is one of the Devil's engines to ruin others, he is a paper-worm or a rack for honest men, and his *ultimum vale* is a deceitful breaking.' There is much of this sort of denunciation in the writing of the time, and unquestionably some scriveners were hard and unscrupulous men. We have ample evidence about Milton, however, to be confident that he was honest and fair in his business dealings, 'a man of the highest integrity', as his son called him. Certainly his lifelong interest in music removes him from the category of mere 'paper-worm'; and whatever tune the populace sang about scriveners, most Englishmen who gathered together to sing psalms were indebted to the skill of Milton after 1621.[58]

In that year there was published a new collection of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* by Thomas Ravenscroft. This book contained a number of fresh four-part settings of old familiar tunes, especially composed for this edition by twenty-one contemporary musicians. Milton contributed two different settings of the York tune and also a harmonization of the Norwich tune. His music graced the old-fashioned metrical versions of Psalms 5, 27, 55, 66, 102, and 138, as well as 'A Prayer to the Holy Ghost'.[59]

In 1623 the musician's family was increased by the addition of a son-in-law. Anne Milton had caught the eye of a government official named Edward Phillips, who had come to London from Shrewsbury as a young man, had been 'bred up in the Crown Office in Chancery', and hoped to become the Deputy Clerk. They were married on 22 November 1623, not in the bride's church of All Hallows, Bread Street, but at St. Stephen's, Walbrook.[60] The minister at St. Stephen's was Thomas Myriell, almost certainly that indefatigable collector of music of the same name, and therefore an old friend of Anne and her father.[61] The scrivener bestowed 'a considerable dowry' upon his only daughter. The marriage settlement, dated 27 November and witnessed by young John and his mother, records, not only the payment of £800 to Edward Phillips, but also the transfer of certain property rights from Edward's widowed mother to the newly married couple, with Anne's interests and the interests of her future children fully protected. When Anne and her husband went to live in the Strand, near Charing Cross, they were doubtless visited often by young John. Their first child, named John after two members of the mother's family, was baptized on 16 January 1625 in the parish church of St. Martin in the Fields.[62]

While Anne experienced her first year of marriage and awaited the birth of her child, her brother, the eager schoolboy, produced what seem to be his earliest extant poems. One must speak with caution about this, for there are a few undated poems which *may* belong to his days at St. Paul's —some epigrams on the Gunpowder Plot; twenty lines of Latin elegiac verse and eight in choriambic tetrameter (plus a Latin prose essay) on the subject of sleep and early rising;[63] a Latin paraphrase, in twelve lines of elegiac verse, of a Latin fable by Baptista Mantuanus in ten lines of the same metre;[64] and, less probably, a polished English translation of the fifth ode of Horace.[65] We are on surer ground when we turn to his English paraphrases of Psalms 114 and 136. These were composed when he was fifteen and in his last year at St. Paul's—a year when he was first studying Hebrew grammar and the Psalter. The two poems may have been school exercises, or they may have been undertaken at the suggestion of his father, whose interest in English versions of the Psalms, suitable for musical settings, must have been considerable. So far as we know, the boy wrote nothing else in English verse until four years later; and although his paraphrases belong to a well-established poetical tradition, school exercises would probably have called for Latin after the elegant model of Buchanan—rarely for the vernacular. If the poems in question were not written at his father's prompting, they at least represent an activity sure to have pleased a musician and his wife who had dedicated their elder son to the ministry.[66]

Viewed thus, Milton's version of Psalm 114, whatever its quality, can tell us something of his reading, his English vocabulary in a Latin age, and his attitudes toward composition in 1624. He was quite accurate later in entitling it a paraphrase, for it is a very free rendering of the original eight lines of Hebrew, far more Milton than psalmist. Some of his deviations merit more than a moment's notice. For example, in the beginning of the Psalm he alters 'Israel, the house of Jacob' to 'the blest seed of Terah's faithful son'. This seems a conventional patronymic, a mere genealogical flourish, until we reflect that Abraham's father, Terah, like the poet's grandfather Milton, was an 'idolater', whereas Terah's devout son, like the poet's own father, had the faith to obey when called to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance. The second line of the paraphrase—'After long toil their liberty had won'—has no equivalent in the original and may have resulted from the necessities of rime. 'Pharian fields' for Egypt reveals not only a youthful fondness for alliteration but also an early interest in unusual names. Milton could have encountered the epithet 'Pharian' in either Buchanan or Sylvester, but where he noticed it is not nearly so important as why. He could easily have written 'Egypt's fields' instead, but chose the more picturesque word.

Lines 4-6 of the paraphrase—

> Led by the strength of the Almighty's hand,
> Jehovah's wonders were in Israel shown,
> His praise and glory was in Israel known

—have no equivalent in the original, although they are Biblical in tone and have the effective use of parallelism so conspicuous in Hebrew poetry. The young Milton is here imitating a manner, not translating anything, and the manner eventually became part of his own. His initial choice of the pentameter line almost compelled him to embellish his original. Thus, the sea not only became 'troubled', and 'shivering' fled (7), but also 'sought to hide his froth-becurlèd head'. 'Froth-becurlèd' is good Homer-Sylvester-

Milton. The remainder of the paraphrase contains similar elaborations of Scripture. Jordan is not simply driven back, but

> Jordan's clear streams recoil
> As a faint host that hath received the foil.

(Milton's gratuitous comparison may have been recalled in the 'faint Satanic host' of his mature composition.) The plain mountains of the Psalm become, for purposes of the pentameter line, 'high, huge-bellied mountains'; and, presumably for the same reason, the rams skip 'amongst their ewes'. At least this appears a more plausible explanation of Milton's embellishment than a possible remembrance of Buchanan's '*ut dux gregis inter oves*'. The 'glassy floods', 'rugged rocks can crush', 'soft rills', and 'fiery flint-stones' of the closing lines are also the poet's additions, partly alliterative, to the simpler language of the Psalm.[67]

Milton had almost certainly been reading Joshua Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas.[68] It is not that he uses words also to be found in Sylvester; it is rather that he imitates Sylvester's *manner*—an odd combination of simple metres and simple riming with ornate language and picturesque epithets. The result is a psalm paraphrase which almost defies being put to music. It reveals to us, however, a youthful poet already competent in metrics and ingenuously fascinated by the colour and sound of words. It may be useless to speculate on why he chose this particular psalm for paraphrasing, but perhaps it was a favourite of his father, for whom the song of the Exodus could have had some personal appeal. It is at least worth noticing that, exactly ten years later, in 1634, Milton paraphrased Psalm 114 again, in Greek. Perhaps it had some association for him with Puritan refugees from England, like Thomas Young.

The paraphrase of Psalm 136 naturally contains many of the characteristics which we have noticed in the rendering of Psalm 114. There are a few compound epithets reminiscent of Homer and Sylvester: 'thunder-clasping hand', 'Large-limbed Og'. A fondness for unusual geographical names, later to be conspicuous in Milton's verse, again appears in 'Erythræan main' for Red Sea. The exigencies of meter again produce a number of colourful adjectives for nouns left unadorned in the Hebrew: 'golden-tressèd' sun, 'painted' heavens, 'hornèd' moon, 'spangled sisters' for stars, 'Tawny King' for Pharaoh. And again Milton is prompted to add sentiments of his own in the spirit of the original; the third stanza, for example, has no equivalent in the Psalm.

The year 1624, in which these verses were composed, was a year of some anxiety for Londoners. The weather was unusually hot and dry, and during the summer and early autumn many persons died of the 'spotted fever'. Parliament met for three months in the spring, and there was talk of war with Spain. Within the Milton household there were minor concerns. On 29 June two of the scrivener's apprentices, James Hodgkinson and Thomas Bower, became free of the Company, and one of them, Bower, had so earned the confidence of his master that he was, the following year, asked to be a partner in the firm. (If the elder Milton ever indulged thoughts of John succeeding him in his prosperous business, this decision ended them.) There were even literary excitements apart from the paraphrasing of psalms. One supposes that the young poet had already noticed and read the newly published folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, but in 1624 there appeared a more scholarly volume which gave him especial pleasure. This was a collection of Oxford verses on the recent death of William Camden; it contained a Latin poem signed 'Carolus Deodatus'.[69]

We do not know when the admiring friend of Diodati began his study of French and Italian, but it is probable that his father provided a tutor or tutors for this instruction—after five in the afternoon—while he was still attending St. Paul's. The order may or may not be significant, but when later, in his *Ad Patrem*, Milton thanks his father for the gift of five tongues, he lists first Latin and Greek, then French and Italian, and then Hebrew. His friendship with the Diodatis presumably whetted the boy's interest in the two modern languages.[70]

On 9 December 1624 Milton celebrated his sixteenth birthday and turned his thoughts to the prospect of higher education. The reasons for the choice of Cambridge instead of Oxford are not difficult to surmise. Diodati was an Oxford man, as were the Gills, father and sons, but on the other hand, Oxford may have had unpleasant associations for the old scrivener, and Cambridge certainly was, in 1624, the English university more deeply imbued with the Puritan tradition. Richard Stock, the rector of All Hallows, and his new curate, Brian Walton, had both been trained there, as had most of the great company of nonconforming worthies which the scrivener's son intended to join. John sought a university education as an essential part of his preparation for the ministry. His father, having long planned for his boy to become a clergyman, stood ready now to finance seven years of study at Cambridge. Seven years hence, upon attaining twenty-three, John could be admitted to the diaconate, and one year later he could become a priest. To the service of the Church of England, Milton declared in 1641, 'by the intentions of my parents and friends I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions'. For him, unlike John Donne and George Herbert, the road to Christian ministry was straight and unmistakable; ahead were no agonizing decisions to face, no secular ambitions to throttle. If it remained for him to modify this youthful plan—to seek, eventually, a ministry that was as personal as it was unorthodox—we should not forget that his original purpose is reflected in much of his youthful verse, which is an unintentional record of dutiful compliance and spiritual adventuring.[71]

The boy who in 1625 turned his eager face to Cambridge was, perhaps, no brighter and no better prepared than some others entering the universities at the time. His basic assumptions and beliefs were those of his literate contemporaries. He knew that good morals were the morals taught by the Bible and by the enlightened pagans of ancient Greece and Rome. He knew that good literature was to be sought in the canon of Greek and Latin classics as summed up by Quintilian. Undisturbed by any perverse notions of natural goodness, he knew that man is born into this world with the taint of original sin, and that sinful boys and young men are naturally attracted neither to good morals nor to good literature. Standing squarely on the experience of the human race, he hoped through continued Christian education to amend his own depraved nature.[72]

His elderly, indulgent parents had, of course, recognized and encouraged a genuine aptitude for study, giving their child ample opportunity to develop his talents and satisfy his intellectual hunger. John had been reared in an environment of worldly activity tempered by a fervent love of music and fear of God. One suspects that the father, frustrated in some of his own ambitions, had resolved to give his son every possible advantage; certainly the boy acquired early a great respect for learning and for humane letters which he later acknowledged gratefully as a paternal gift. 'The ceaseless diligence and care' of his father in his education was something he regarded as a loan to be faithfully repaid, with interest beyond a scrivener's fondest dreams.

# 2. Cambridge, 1625–1629

Every boy entering a university expects it to be a wonderful, exciting world, different from anything he has ever known. If he is studious, eager, and serious-minded, he naturally expects a university to be peopled with boys not unlike himself, and with greybeards of rare intellectual powers and personalities to match. If, in addition, he arrives with the applause of schoolteachers still ringing in his ears, with a hunger for learning still unsatisfied, and with an idealistic determination to fulfil the high hopes of doting parents, he will suffer disappointments and heartaches difficult to endure.

That John Milton was such a boy there is much to persuade us. Recently turned sixteen, he was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, on Saturday, 12 February 1625, almost exactly a month after the Lent term had begun.[1] With six other new students of Christ's he matriculated in the University on Saturday, 9 April, one day after the end of the term. His status was that of a 'lesser-pensioner', socially below that of the 'fellow-commoners' or 'greater-pensioners', who paid more and enjoyed certain privileges in consequence, but superior to that of the 'sizars', the poorer students who paid least, performed various menial duties, and received inferior accommodation. As the son of a London businessman who was prepared to invest about £50 annually in his boy's education, John entered college with a suitable rank.[2] Whether his emotional and intellectual equipment was also suitable to the life ahead remained to be tested.

When he donned his cap and gown, and struggled to realize that he was a Cambridge undergraduate at last, he faced a bewildering series of new sensations, a time of difficult adjustment. Removed from the familiar and appreciative society of St. Paul's School, of home and neighbours, the boy had to accustom himself to new ways, new faces. The University was indeed another world, but one, he soon learned, where a developing personality, a precocious mind, and a promising talent were not much of a novelty. The course of study was medieval and tradition-taut; the tastes and desires of the solitary student were unconsulted. One did what one was told. Milton found himself part of a large, almost monastic community, consisting of more than three thousand men and boys divided among sixteen colleges which were situated in, yet isolated from, a town of perhaps five thousand people. The University had one government; the town, with its fourteen parishes, had another. The University was represented in Parliament by two members; the town was represented by two. In 1625 Cambridge and Oxford had reached a position of unprecedented influence in the political and religious life of the nation; their graduates, more numerous than at any previous time, were filling almost every position of importance which English society offered. Yet, living in Cambridge, one did not think of such things; one felt completely apart from the world of affairs. London seemed as far away as Virginia. The University was an island, where busy worshippers at the shrine of the Past seldom heard the remote and restless waves of the Present.

Trinity and St. John's were the largest colleges; Christ's, though an older foundation, was third in size, a community of about 265 persons. Seen from the street its main building was a picturesque structure, with little battlements and graceful chimney-stacks. One entered, past the porter's lodge, into a spacious court, upon which opened the chapel, the dining-hall, and various living quarters. Behind, there was an extensive garden, with a pond, a bowling-green, and shady walks. Here also was the New Building, a small, wooden structure stretching parallel to the kitchen and the butteries, with its south end abutting on the corner of Christ's Piece. Including attics it contained about twelve chambers, each with two or more occupants. No student had a chamber entirely to himself; some of the younger boys even shared beds. In the old building the attic rooms and those on the ground floor each held three or four boys, one of whom was usually a Bachelor of Arts. The first-story rooms, considered the most desirable, were reserved for the thirteen Fellows, who might share them with their sizars. Each chamber held as many beds as it could accommodate, and each had several 'studies' attached, where the younger students were supposed to work. Even so, there was not enough room for everyone, and, in quiet violation of the University statutes, some students were lodged in the nearby Brazen George, an old inn on St. Andrew's Street, in charge of Troilus Atkinson, the College factotum.

Tradition has obligingly assigned Milton one of the choice rooms in the main building, on the left side of the (now) First Court as one enters from the street, the first floor set on the right hand of the first staircase on that side (staircase N). It is possible that, toward the end of his college days, the poet shared this chamber—where Wordsworth, visiting a century and a half later, grew tipsy on wine and romantic memories. But as a freshman, Milton probably had a bed to himself in a room with two or three other boys, in the temporary, wooden building in the Second Court known as 'the little building' or Rats' Hall.[3]

He was not completely surrounded by strangers. Robert Pory, a schoolmate at St. Paul's, had matriculated from Christ's on the same day with him; and there to welcome them to the College were Edward Collins and

John Redrish, Paulines they had both known a year or so before. There were other old acquaintances from school scattered about the University —John Slater and Ralph and Robert Calvert at Caius, Edward Lane at St. John's, Nathaniel Harwood at Queens', Thomas Horton at Emmanuel, John Ricketts and Richard Tedder at Jesus—and with some of these boys Milton may have spent his first weeks of exploration: climbing to the top of King's Chapel for the breathtaking view, strolling along the banks of the Cam at the 'backs' of the Colleges, walking in the open fields across the river, and seeing the various 'sights' of the town. He soon learned the location of the University buildings which were to be important in his life. He inspected the University church, Great St. Mary's, and, leaving its west door, went down Regent Walk, past the shops of booksellers, to the porch of the Schools Quadrangle. He was shown the old library on the first floor of the south wing of the Schools, a place now used for lectures and public exercises; and then the University Library itself, a collection suffering from pillage and carelessness, inadequately housed on the first floor of the east wing. At St. John's College, by way of contrast, there was the fabric of a beautiful new library nearing completion.[4]

One of Milton's first duties, after taking up residence, was to call upon his tutor for instructions. He had been assigned to Mr. William Chappell, a man of forty-two who had been a Fellow of the College since 1607. We do not know the pupil's first impressions, but he probably counted himself fortunate. Chappell was famed throughout the University as a 'learned, painful, careful tutor' and as an exceptionally able disputant in the Schools. Some people regarded him as a Puritan because of the strictness of his life and conversation, but everyone conceded his erudition, conspicuous in that assembly of erudite men.[5]

The Master of Christ's was Dr. Thomas Bainbridge, a person of no great scholarly ability but a conscientious and able administrator, inclined, like many people conscious of their own limitations, to be something of a martinet. He was about forty-six years old and had been Master since 1622. William Power, the oldest of the Fellows, was approximately the same age; he had been Lady Margaret preacher since 1613 and was also minister of Fen Drayton in Cambridgeshire; of all those in the College he was probably the most staunch Anglican in religious sympathies. Two other older Fellows were William Siddall, about Chappell's age, and Joseph Mead, thirty-seven, a versatile man, famed as a teacher, as an authority on Homer, and as a well-informed observer of world affairs. In addition to these there were a number of young Fellows, all in their twenties or very early thirties: John Alsop, Francis Cooke, Robert Gell, Michael Honywood, John Knowesley (replaced in 1626 by John Forster), Andrew Sandelands, Arthur Scot, John Simson, and Nathaniel Tovey. As a new student Milton quickly came to learn their names and to form his opinion of their characters.[6]

He left no record of what he then thought. Nor do we know what impression any of these men formed of the new boy from London. With all the smugness of hindsight we can smile at their probable unawareness of his future greatness, but if we do so, we should also remember that some of these Fellows had futures which their pupil could not foresee. Honywood eventually became Dean of Lincoln; Chappell became Bishop of Cork and Ross. Gell, as the beloved rector of St. Mary Aldermary in London, lived to marry Milton to his third wife; and Sandelands, the Scotsman, as one who had fared badly in the political upheavals of the age, lived to beg Milton's help with the ruling powers. Mead, perhaps the most brilliant and promising of all the Fellows in 1625, died while still labouring in the service of his College, and was buried in its chapel.

The day at Christ's began at five, when everyone attended chapel for the morning service. Then, after breakfast, the morning was filled with college or university work: a student might be examined by his tutor, or listen to one of the College lecturers, or hear a University lecture in the Public Schools, or attend the disputations which were a necessary part of everyone's preparation for a degree. After dinner at noon, one might be required to attend further disputations, but, normally, most of the afternoon was free—as was the evening, following vespers and supper at seven. However, no one was allowed out of College after nine, except during the period from Easter to Michaelmas, when the hour was extended to ten o'clock.[7]

We do not know precisely what Milton was taught at Cambridge. There was no system of annual, University-wide examinations; and by 1625 there had been considerable modification of the curriculum prescribed by the Elizabethan statutes of 1561, which emphasized rhetoric in the first year, logic in the second and third, and metaphysics in the fourth. Additional subjects such as Greek and a little mathematics had been introduced; the system of study had varied somewhat from college to college; and the original importance of University lecturers or professors had diminished with the attempts of individual colleges to provide most of the instruction for their own students.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make a reasonable guess at the kind of work done by Milton during his four years of preparation for the B.A. degree. He undoubtedly continued his study of Greek and Hebrew, begun at St. Paul's, although we know that he composed no Greek verse. Daily he visited his tutor, Mr. Chappell, for lessons in rhetoric, logic, and ethics; and daily he attended the declamations, catechizings, disputations, and other exercises held in the College chapel, eventually participating in these. From time to time certain Fellows of Christ's probably held classes on announced subjects, teaching and examining such students as enrolled. Whether told to or not, an earnest undergraduate like Milton doubtless attended the divinity Acts at the Schools, and also attended public lectures by the more eminent University professors. Andrew Downes, Regius Professor of Greek since 1585, was under pressure to retire; his memory was failing him; but Milton may have gone to hear this tall, ruddy-faced man with the alert eyes who had been one of the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible. Samuel Collins, Provost of King's and Regius Professor of Divinity, lectured twice a week. Reckoned the most fluent Latinist of his age, he was famed also for his remarkable memory and biting wit. A student who admired the new philosophy of Bacon, and who chafed at the pedantry of the Schools, could idolize a scholar like Collins. There were others to attract a boy intent on learning: Robert Metcalf of St. John's, the Hebraist; Samuel Ward, Master of Sidney and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, mild, slow of speech, but profound. The range of studies, however, was as narrow as the life at Cambridge, where tutors acted as house-masters, and breadth of interest was officially discouraged. If Milton learned much about history or science or mathematics, he probably did so by private reading; and if he continued, as we have reason to believe he did, his study of such modern foreign languages as French and Italian, he either taught himself or paid for private tuition. English literature, of course, was undreamed of as an academic subject.[8]

Yet Milton, like many of his Cambridge contemporaries, found leisure under the prevailing system for a great deal of miscellaneous, private reading, and there can be little doubt that during his student days he not only read widely in the Greek and Latin classics, and in theology, but also became acquainted with a number of modern authors. No record has survived of this desultory but very influential study; we must infer its character from the style of his compositions dating from the period and from a few hints in his later writing. This I shall attempt in due course.

Since travel was both difficult and expensive, more students remained in Cambridge during vacation periods than later generations might suppose. Some, to be sure, owned their own horses; and there were horses to hire at the stable of old Thomas Hobson the carrier, whose wagon travelled regularly between the University and the Bull Inn, Bishopsgate Street, London—a journey of nearly twelve hours (thirteen or longer in bad weather) with a noontime stop at Bishop's Stortford for dinner and a change of horses. But Milton, we may be confident, spent a number of his vacations, including summers, in the lonely quiet of his college room.[9]

We have no record of what he did for recreation, but, again, reasonable guesses are possible. We need no documentary evidence to be certain that he rode horseback. Later in life, we know, walking was his favourite exercise, and in the early afternoon he would walk three or four hours at a time. He himself tells us that he was adept in using a sword, and so we may suppose that fencing was a skill he learned at Cambridge. Writing about education in 1644, he recommended wrestling as a sport for growing boys. On his walks, when the sun was hot and the river cool and inviting, he may also have joined the other undergraduates who, despite old decrees to the contrary, enjoyed bathing in the Cam.[10]

One of the problems facing every freshman with a conscience was determining which of the many rules and regulations were to be observed. For example, according to the rules an undergraduate was supposed to obtain special permission and then be accompanied by his tutor or a Master of Arts if he left the College walls on anything except academic business; but students wandered about the town quite freely, some of them even frequenting the forbidden taverns ('the best tutors in the University', they smirked). Despite King James's pronouncements on tobacco, smoking was a common habit. Undergraduates were required to speak Latin at all times except during hours of relaxation in their rooms, but this rule, too, was frequently broken. More disturbing to the idealistic, serious-minded freshman than such laxity—some of which he may have welcomed—was the conduct of the fellow-commoners and even many of the lesser-pensioners who had no intention of remaining the four years needed for the first degree, and who, accordingly, treated the whole life of the University as an excuse for frivolity. These 'tulips', as Mr. Mead called them, wore academic gowns of any colour whatsoever over their own extreme and absurd costumes. Some sported boots and spurs; others, more dandified, flaunted the latest fashions in bands and ruffs and dainty cuffs. Their efforts at sophistication led them to gambling, drinking, and worse vices; and the most reckless among them openly scoffed at religion, behaved disgracefully in church and chapel, and exhibited 'debauched and atheistical' principles.[11]

We shall learn what Milton thought of some of his contemporaries at Cambridge, but we must try, first, to complete the story of his almost disastrous freshman year. The facts elude us, but one thing is clear: for some reason the sixteen-year-old and Mr. Chappell, his tutor, failed to get along. Perhaps the boy's precocity and independence of mind irritated Chappell. Perhaps Milton rebelled at tasks assigned him, deeming them a stupid waste of time. But guessing is futile; we have only the characters of the two as a basis for conjecture; and Chappell seems to have been, by the standards of the day, a wholly admirable tutor. Whatever the cause, there were misunderstandings, and the misunderstandings grew.[12]

Meanwhile, 1625 was a year of unusual tension for England, dwarfing the concerns of the individual. It was a year of death and ominous portents. Milton was admitted to Christ's College on 12 February; on 26 February there was a destructive tide on the Thames, the highest known in thirty or forty years. King James died on 27 March. When Charles was proclaimed at the market-cross in Cambridge three cold days later, the voice of the crier was followed by a peal of thunder. During April the plague attacked London; during May the funeral of the late king was solemnized at Cambridge, and the new king married a French princess, Henrietta Maria. As the Easter term ended, a student was drowned in the Cam. The plague spread; undergraduates like Milton did not know whether to remain in Cambridge or hurry to their homes. In July, Hobson the carrier was forbidden his weekly trips to London, and on 1 August all sermons and other public occasions at the University were discontinued. The plague took thirty-five thousand victims that autumn.[13]

We are ignorant of Milton's movements during this period. He may have been one of the few who remained at Cambridge; more likely, he and his family fled to the country for safety. We can note, however, a few facts which concerned him. On 7 October old John Benbow, Deputy Clerk of the Crown Office, died (in Eltham), and Edward Phillips, Milton's brother-in-law, was soon promoted to the position.[14] The University reassembled late in the autumn.[15] On 10 December Charles Diodati received his B.A. degree at Oxford.[16] Milton's sister gave birth to a second child, baptized Anne on 12 January 1626.[17] The first child, John, was now a year old. The grandfather of these babies, at sixty-three, had served as Steward of the Scriveners Company in 1625.[18]

On 2 February 1626 Charles I was crowned at Westminster Abbey. All things considered, the new monarch enjoyed the good will of his subjects, but it was remarked by many as a bad omen that the Queen was absent from the ceremony and that William Laud was substituted for John Williams, Dean of Westminster, whose liberal sympathies had lost him the royal favour.[19]

It was probably in March of 1626 that Milton's difficulties with his tutor came to a head. Years later, Christopher Milton told John Aubrey that his brother received 'some unkindness' from Mr. Chappell. Recording this, Aubrey added a note (perhaps from Christopher, perhaps from some other source) that Chappell 'whipped him'. It may be so. In any case, John was evidently sent home, in 'rustication', for a failure to conform. University and college discipline must be preserved. It is not easy to distinguish between foolish boys and future bards at seventeen.[20]

The event prompted Milton to compose a poem. His *Elegia Prima* is a remarkable document, best understood by those who have not forgotten their own adolescence. Scholarship can explain its fine classical allusions and rhetorical flourishes; a knowledge of Latin metrics can bring appreciation of its alternate hexameters and pentameters; but its charm, its unconscious humour, its laboured nonchalance are apparent only to readers who remember their youth with a mixture of laughter and tears.[21]

Let us try to reconstruct the situation. Milton, sent down from the University, is angry and indignant of course—positive that he has been misunderstood and mistreated. There are awkward explanations to be made, to his parents, to his teachers at St. Paul's, to his friend and former schoolfellow, Diodati. A letter to Charles is especially hard to write, because Charles has been successful as a student at Oxford. Still, a letter is written at last, and the melancholy turn of affairs explained. Milton settles down to life at home, trying to feel that all is for the best, but wondering, nevertheless, what the immediate future holds. Hungry for sympathy and understanding, he awaits a reply from Diodati. Days pass. Finally, after an intolerable time, the answer arrives. Charles is visiting near Chester, five days or so away from London, and Milton's letter was delayed in reaching him. He is distressed at John's misfortune and effusive in expressions of sympathy. Exile is a terrible thing. Milton must be lonely and feeling at loose ends. Perhaps the University will relent in its harshness and take the poet back.

Milton reads his friend's letter (now lost, like his own first message) and reacts according to his youth. The long-awaited sympathy is unwanted. Charles must not think him disturbed unduly by this slight reversal. He is enjoying his exile—yes, enjoying it. After all, it is, in a sense, an exile self-imposed; he is at home only because he wants to be. As for Cambridge, he is well rid of the place. He disliked it from the first. Charles must not think him unhappy. He has leisure now for reading and —and other things. He is very happy. Charles must be told how very happy he is.

So he writes a poem to prove it. The poem is the verse-letter, *Elegia Prima*. Understood in its emotional context, it is a thoroughly engaging piece of youthful rationalization, the product of a courageous but innocent spirit. Its purpose is to impress another youngster with the writer's nonchalance in the face of adult tyranny and unreasonableness. Under the rhetoric and redundance and semi-learned allusions is a boyish *naïveté* completely lovable. Milton knew himself Diodati's superior in book-knowledge, but his friend's sophistication and worldliness (at seventeen, remember!) constituted a challenge. Having composed forty-six lines of the poem, he suddenly realized that Charles might not be convinced of his happiness by mere talk of reading, and so he added a long passage about carefree walks in the suburbs and ogling pretty girls. English women, he argued knowingly, are the most beautiful in the world.

The *Elegia Prima* is a funny, pathetic, normal effort of an adolescent boy to impress another boy with his indifference to something that has hurt him deeply. It is rich in unintended humour, and the most amusing part of all comes at the end. Before Milton finished the verse-epistle it was decided —and not by the poet, obviously—that he should return to Cambridge immediately. After all the manly words, after all the flimsy nonchalance, the poem concludes with its only piece of news. Milton struggled hard to provide a transition, but the ending is abrupt—and unforgettably ironic. Back to the hated University he must go. Still, irony is occasionally lost on youth, and a poem composed is a poem composed. We can be glad that he did not destroy this intimate revelation, for it is a pleasant reminder in Latin elegiacs that Milton was once seventeen.

The letter is interesting in still other ways. As a portrait of the artist as a very young man it contains Milton's first attempt to catalogue his youthful pleasures. It is thus a pale and politic foreshadowing of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which also record his delight in leisure, in walking, and in books. Drama receives considerable emphasis in the *Elegia Prima*, although, as one critic has remarked, Milton seems not to distinguish between the 'well-trod stage' and the well-thumbed page. Pretty girls receive the most emphasis of all. For this the desire to impress Diodati is chiefly responsible, but something is owing to the influence of Ovid, whose smooth style and pagan imagery Milton copies here and in subsequent elegies. Ovid captured his imagination early and held it long.[22] At seventeen the boy was, in truth, more susceptible to the sensuous beauty of Latin verse than to the charms of flesh-and-blood girls.

If the poem was written in April of 1626, as seems likely, Milton may have returned to Cambridge for the beginning of the Easter term, 19 April. He was at once transferred to another tutor, Nathaniel Tovey,[23] and the new arrangement evidently proved mutually satisfactory. It is likely that Milton (or his father) asked for Tovey on the advice of either Richard Stock, the rector of All Hallows, or Dr. Diodati. Both were well acquainted with the Haringtons of Exton, who, it happens, had extended patronage to both Tovey and his father. Milton's new teacher was the son of John Tovey, who had been Master of the grammar school at Coventry and, as an old man, travelling-tutor of young John Harington. Orphaned when a child, Nathaniel Tovey had been taken into the household of Harington's sister, Lucy, Countess of Bedford, who, recognizing his ability, had sent him to Sidney Sussex College in 1612. Two years after taking both degrees in arts, he had been appointed a Fellow of Christ's and lecturer in logic for the College. When he assumed responsibility for Milton's education, he was about twenty-seven years old and was preparing to take the B.D. degree. Significantly, he was about the age of young Alexander Gill of St. Paul's School. Perhaps, like Gill, he treated the talented student as a friend, encouraged freedom of conversation, and even exchanged verses with him. Whatever the secret, we know that he continued as John's tutor, and five years later became Christopher's tutor, when John's brother was admitted to Christ's College.

Richard Stock died on 20 April 1626, the day after the Easter term began at Cambridge. He was succeeded as rector of All Hallows by Samuel Purchas, author of the *Pilgrimes*, who died about five months later. The plague had ended, yet 1626 was a year which must have seemed to Milton remarkable for the number of deaths it brought. In February it was Barnaby Googe, Master of Magdalene College; in April, Francis Bacon; in May, Arthur Lake, Bishop of Bath and Wells, and Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk and Chancellor of the University; in June, Valentine Cary, former Master of Christ's, now Bishop of Exeter; in July, Samuel

Walsall, Master of Corpus Christi; in September, Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester; in October, Nicholas Felton, Bishop of Ely, Dr. John Gostlin, Master of Caius and retiring Vice-Chancellor of the University, and Richard Ridding, one of the esquire bedells; in November, John Hills, Master of St. Catharine's; and in December, Sir John Davies. It was a grievous year for Cambridge. There was official mourning for the Chancellor, although the complexities of his personal life and the little sympathy he had shown for learning somewhat lessened the grief. Bacon was one of the University's most distinguished sons; in advocating his new philosophy he had always expressed his sense of indebtedness to Cambridge; and while no official action could be taken, his death was lamented in many verses, from which a selection was printed in London by his secretary. In the five colleges which had lost their masters, more verses were undoubtedly written; it was the accepted way of commemorating the dead.[24]

During this year of lost leaders in university and public life, Milton made an effort to adjust himself and to live down whatever disgrace he may have experienced. That he was successful we infer, not merely from the fact of his continuing a student, but, indirectly, from his writing. Beginning with the autumn of 1626 there was an outburst of poetic activity, social in impetus and direction if not noticeably social in tone. The immediate encouragement may well have come from his new tutor, but, whatever the cause, for the first time in his life Milton was confidently addressing an audience apart from his parents and intimate friends. He was writing in a manner and upon themes dictated by a group of contemporary versifiers, of whom he was one. The poems were all in Latin, as befitted a university undergraduate. The style was rhetorical, the sentiments were conventional, and the lines were loaded with learned allusions. Feeling himself part of something, Milton entered with characteristic energy into the game. His early enthusiasm for Ovid, Virgil, and Horace inspired him to imitate these masters with gusto and considerable skill. The results may, at first glance, be disappointing to the searcher for autobiography, because the Latin verses are almost devoid of topical references and personal emotion; yet the fact of their existence, plus their technical competence, tells us something. Milton, who loved to excel in anything, had discovered a new side of Cambridge—and of himself.[25]

In Horatian alcaics he mourned the recent death of Dr. John Gostlin, who had been Vice-Chancellor of the University in the period of Milton's quarrel with Chappell and who, just possibly, had been kind to the new student in difficulties.[26] Most of the poem is conventional enough, but some readers think they detect a tone of genuine feeling in the dignified close. Certainly the poem on the death of Richard Ridding, one of the esquire bedells, which Milton composed soon after the verses on Gostlin, is completely conventional in tone and statement.[27] These two poems are more crowded with geographical and proper names than any later product of their author's muse; they are short, but they are bursting with youthful erudition. The somewhat hyperbolic lines on Ridding may even have been intended as undergraduate humour—we shall never know. The most interesting thing about this poem is the fact that Milton wrote it in Ovidian elegiacs, like the recent verse-letter to Diodati, and thus started a series of elegies.

To this same period of extraordinary activity belong, probably, some of the elegiac epigrams on the Gunpowder Plot, written in commemoration of the Fifth of November.[28] In them Milton rails, as was expected of him, against the Pope and Roman Catholicism. Such verse currency was always from the same die. For us to assume deep personal conviction from more or less conventional exercises is a mistake, even when we know that the poet, as a parishioner of Richard Stock, had heard from childhood the evils of Rome denounced and deplored. This same poet, five years later, was to sing the praises of a Roman Catholic Marchioness of Winchester and, in his *Il Penseroso*, give us one of the most sympathetic portraits of a nun to be found in English literature. In 1626, while he was choosing his subjects in blissful unconcern for literal-minded consistency, Milton also learned to blend unblushingly the moods of Christian piety with the beauties of pagan mythology. His audience evidently approved this typically Renaissance mixture, because his pen kept busy, and not with the introspective and romantic stuff that oozes from loneliness.

Feeling his own powers, Milton now determined upon a more ambitious effort, a sustained poetic flight upon a truly grand theme, *In Quintum Novembris*. The thwarting of the Gunpowder Plot—the most sensational and significant event since the defeat of the Spanish Armada—lent itself to nobility of language, to passages of lofty description. Its protagonists were God and England; its antagonists, the Devil and the Pope of Rome. It was almost an epic theme. Carried away by his idea, Milton overlooked, of course, the obvious limitations of his subject. For twenty-one years the Gunpowder Plot had been celebrated in verse, and certain conventions had been well established. The story was essentially melodramatic—good against evil—and the denouement was abrupt. The incident had inspired much pious gloating over Roman treachery frustrated, much crude jesting at the expense of the baffled villains; but the elements of motivating personality, or even dramatic suspense, were barely present. The story, in fact, was too brief for extended treatment, unless the poet decorated it with his imagination.[29]

Milton made a commendable effort. He began with a picture of England under James, at peace and worshipping the true God. Not elaborating, he hurried on to the challenge of a colourful description of Satan, who, ranging through the air and the vast circle of the earth, observes with anger the piety of the English. About forty lines are devoted to this flight of fancy, which is handled with eloquence and some pictorial power. Satan is then made to observe Italy and the pagan rites of Rome, a vigorously satiric picture sustained for only twenty-five lines. Finally, the Evil One, disguised as a Franciscan, visits the Pope and incites him to plot against the English Parliament. The treachery of November the Fifth is now planned.

Using a conventional transition (the coming of dawn), Milton then plunged into the second part of his story—and the limitations of his material began to bother him. The Pope is made to enlist the services of Murder and Treason, and the grisly cave in which these forces of evil live permits fifteen lines of picturesque description. God is then introduced on the side of His favoured people, the English—and the poet hurries on, making no attempt to portray divine Providence. Instead, he draws on memories of Virgil and Ovid for a vivid delineation of Fame, who, commanded by God, is caused to warn England of its danger. At this point the narrative sags to a conclusion, as though Milton had run out of ideas.

*In Quintum Novembris*, a poem of 226 lines, is a considerable achievement for a boy of seventeen, whatever its weaknesses. Considered in its totality it may be counted a failure, for it rarely rises above its poor material, contains no unifying emotion or idea, and flags too often in inspiration. It is a conventional job, in manner and in subject-matter. But it has brilliant moments. In it, at any rate, is the promise of an artist with genuine descriptive power. In it, too, is the harsh Protestant zeal which in seventeenth-century England passed for patriotism. If Milton read this poem before his fellow students assembled in the College chapel on 5 November, it must have been received with general applause and, in some quarters, open-mouthed admiration.

Stimulated to further writing, the poet composed his *Elegia Tertia* on the death of Lancelot Andrewes;[30] and soon after celebrating the deceased Bishop of Winchester, he wrote another poem, in iambic trimeters and dimeters, on the death of Nicholas Felton, Bishop of Ely.[31] The two prelates had died within ten days of one another; each had formerly been Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge; Andrewes, when translated from the see of Ely to that of Winchester, had been succeeded at Ely by his old friend, Felton. Recognizing what Thomas Fuller later called the 'great conformity' between these two bishops, Milton impartially mourned each of them in a poem of sixty-eight lines, with similar exclamations against death and with traditional visions of the departed in heaven. He even referred to the first poem in the opening lines of the second.

When great ones die, poets in search of subjects weep easily. This is not to say, however, that Milton was unmoved by the ravages of death in 1626. In the *Elegia Tertia* he mentioned the recent plague and the grievous losses among Protestant leaders in the Thirty Years War on the Continent Men of the seventeenth century lived more intimately with death than we;

every visit of the plague to London meant a terrible threat to Milton's family. Familiarity breeds, nevertheless, conventional attitudes; and in his youthful poems on death Milton speaks the seemingly impersonal language of poetic tradition. We cannot separate his 'real' feelings from the feelings borrowed from books. He learned early to rub the lamp of humanism in order to summon the protective spirit of literary analogy. In exile from Cambridge he remembered Ovid, just as later, in blindness, he would remember Homer. Facing the uncomfortable fact of death he could invoke a hundred poems, in all of which departed souls are either canonized or deified.

A modern reader, knowing Milton's later hatred of Episcopacy, may remark his early verses in eulogy of two Anglican bishops and ponder the apparent change in attitude. To accuse the poet of inconsistency in this regard would be absurd, however. In the bright morning of youth, hobgoblins of foolish consistency hold no terrors. Furthermore, no change in attitude is to be inferred from the poems on Winchester and Ely, because no personal attitudes are expressed in them; the writer celebrates, not two bishops who held this or that theological view, but two prominent Christians and Cantabrigians who had died. The poems were written, not because Milton at seventeen recognized a distinction between Andrewes, say, and other, less worthy exponents of Episcopacy, but rather because Milton at seventeen was an enthusiastic poet in search of suitable subjects.

On the other hand, in 1626 he must have been aware of current religious questions, particularly those which involved his University. Two names often mentioned during this year, whenever Cambridge men discussed public affairs, were those of Richard Montagu and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. Immediately after the death of James I, Montagu, a former Fellow of King's College, had published a highly controversial book; his *Appello Cæsarem*, cleverly written and closely argued, in the name of the Church of England had repudiated both the doctrines of Rome and the teachings of Calvinism. Since the author had openly identified his views with the tradition of teaching at Cambridge, intense feeling had been aroused at the University, as elsewhere. In July of 1625 he had been censured by the House of Commons. In August three bishops—John Buckeridge, John Howson, and William Laud—had rallied to his defence, drawing up a memorial to Buckingham which denounced the 'fatal opinions' of Montagu's opponents. In January of 1626 Bishop Andrewes also approved Montagu's thesis. Buckingham called a conference at York House, and in February Montagu defended himself while his doctrinal position was formally debated by eminent divines. No sooner had his party claimed a victory than the Commons, taking matters into their own hands, ordered his book to be burnt. Then, on 8 May, the Commons impeached Montagu's great patron, Buckingham.

Cambridge was brought directly into the imbroglio when its Chancellor, the Earl of Suffolk, died on 28 May; King Charles at once let it be known that he wanted Buckingham to have the post. Although most of the heads of colleges readily agreed, many of the younger Masters of Arts, sympathizing with the attitude of the Commons, rebelled, proposing Thomas Howard, Earl of Berkshire, as a rival candidate. There was much excitement over the election; the issue was essentially Puritanism against Anglicanism. The opposition, however, was poorly organized, and when the votes were cast on 1 June, Buckingham won by a slight majority. Its distrust of the universities accentuated by this action, the Commons, thoroughly exasperated, were prevented from ordering an investigation only by the interference of King Charles, who posed tactfully as a defender of the University's rights. The Commons thereupon demanded the dismissal of Buckingham, and the King, in high displeasure, prorogued Parliament on 26 June. At Cambridge, feelings were mixed over this turn of events, but most people rejoiced at what they considered a University victory over the Commons. On 13 July the new Chancellor was formally installed.[32]

As a mere undergraduate Milton had no voice in the election of a Chancellor, yet he can hardly have been ignorant of the feeling aroused in the Fellows of his own College over the affair. Tovey seems not to have voted; but Mead and Chappell were for Berkshire; Dr. Bainbridge, Alsop, Cooke, Scot, and Simson were for Buckingham. One of Berkshire's most distinguished adherents was Nicholas Felton, Bishop of Ely, whom Milton may have seen and heard on this occasion—only a few months before his death.[33]

One other event, of the many which Milton must have noticed in 1626, may be briefly mentioned. On the morning of 23 June there was considerable excitement when a volume containing three pietistic treatises was discovered in the belly of a codfish in the Cambridge fish-market. The wits of the University made much of the occurrence, but the graver sort, including Dr. Gostlin, the Vice-Chancellor, regarded it as a dismal portent. Informed of the strange phenomenon, Archbishop Ussher declared it to be a providential warning to prepare for suffering.[34]

When Milton went home for the Christmas vacation in 1626, he doubtless met the new rector of All Hallows, Bread Street. Dr. Daniel Featley, a short little man with a wife considerably older than himself, was famed as a preacher and Jesuit-baiter. He had recently been domestic chaplain to George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had given him the All Hallows post. During 1626 he had published two anonymous tracts against Montagu, as well as a popular manual of private devotion. He was an energetic person, plain-spoken but scholarly; the young Cambridge student must have found him impressive. Almost twenty years later, Milton himself was to be attacked in print by this noted controversialist.[35]

Early in March 1627 Buckingham paid his first formal visit to Cambridge as Chancellor, and there were many ceremonies, together with much ringing of bells, banqueting, and sightseeing. Milton seems to have written no verses for the occasion; but before the month ended he again employed the elegiac metre to compose a verse-letter, this time to Thomas Young, who was still pastor to the English merchants in Hamburg. Young, it will be remembered, had ceased being Milton's tutor when the latter was a boy of about eleven. Now, all of eighteen, and soon to begin his third year as a university student, Milton wrote to this man who had known him as a mere child, when he was really another person. The letter is in Latin, of course, to show Young his present mastery over the learned tongue; and it is in poetry, to exhibit his most recent accomplishments. The tone is one of studied elegance and modesty, as might be expected of a talented boy writing to a former teacher. Milton, who had been silent for more than three years, is self-conscious about resuming correspondence. Now, early in 1627, Young had sent his former pupil a gift of a Hebrew Bible. Milton was slow in acknowledging it, but during the vacation period, spurred perhaps by rumours of war near Hamburg, he finally composed a verse-letter. Then, not having mentioned the recent gift in the poem, he expressed his thanks in a covering note, in prose, dated from London, 26 March.[36]

The *Elegia Quarta* is conceived carefully, its first fifty lines being a rhetorical exordium addressed, not to Young, but to the verse-letter itself. There are many consequential flourishes and elaborate gestures of diffidence. The opening sixteen lines speed the message to Hamburg with appropriate references to Virgil, Ovid, Aeolus, Doris, Medea, Triptolemus, and Hama. Next, the letter is informed about its recipient. Because Young introduced him to classical studies, Milton holds his old teacher dearer than Alcibiades held Socrates or Alexander held Aristotle. Three vernal equinoxes, two summers and two autumns have passed since the pupil last saw his beloved master. The letter must speed, therefore, to find the good pastor piously engaged with his family and to deliver, with becoming modesty, Milton's greeting.

This preface is pretty if not very informative. If it left Young suitably aware of his former student's progress, it accomplished its purpose. Milton had learned to handle the elegiac metre with confidence and he had learned, as well, to weave a rich tapestry of allusion. In writing to his one-time tutor he could afford an introduction longer than the whole poems he composed about Dr. Gostlin or Richard Ridding.

At last addressing Young in the first person, he cannot avoid apologizing for his tardiness in writing. Having no good excuse, he devotes sixteen lines—with apposite allusions to Ulysses, noble lions, and forgiving deities—to a request for forgiveness. This awkward business disposed of, he manifests a grown-up interest in the war which threatens Hamburg and expresses his concern over Young's safety. He realizes that Young's residence abroad is a result of religious persecution, and reflects that

Elijah and Paul, and Jesus himself, were also fugitives. These sober thoughts—Milton's first poetic references to religious controversy—prompt him to reassure and hearten the exile, in language mature and dignified. God watches over His own, now as in time past. As once He protected Jerusalem against Sennacherib, and Samaria against the Syrian host, so today (the poet implies without saying) God will guard His chosen ones in distant Hamburg. Remember always to hope, Milton urges in conclusion, for better days will surely come.

When Thomas Young read this remarkable letter, he probably paused to remind himself of the writer's age. From the final passages of the poem it is a little difficult to tell who is pupil, who is teacher. The shift in tone is so gradual, however—so unlaboured and imperceptible—that there is scarcely a trace of pomposity in it. After the graceful but artificial beginning, Milton grows abject, and unavoidably personal, over his limitations as a correspondent. This brings up the subject of the war (perhaps his immediate stimulus to write), which in turn suggests the causes of Young's exile from England. Becoming indignant, the poet denounces the persecution of godly men and, with genuine conviction, bids Young to be of good cheer. It is almost as though Milton matured in the very process of composition. For a youngster of eighteen it is a considerable, and a revealing, performance. It tells us much, however little it told Thomas Young. There is not an item of news in the entire letter.

A few months after Milton dispatched this poem to his former tutor, his father, the scrivener, took steps to insure his son's future and pay for his continued education. On 11 June 1627 he lent £300 to a gentleman from Forest Hill, Oxfordshire, receiving a statute staple bond of £500 made out, not to himself, but to young John. The loan, at eight per cent., would bring £24 interest annually.[37] A little later in June he completed arrangements for the purchase of a property between Covent Garden and the King's highway, in the parish of St. Martin in the Fields, where Anne and Edward Phillips lived.[38] This investment of more than £350, made in the names of both John and himself, could be expected to bring a good rent, the present tenant of the house being Dr. Matthew Lister, a prominent physician.[39] These were provident acts, and we shall later be concerned with their consequences. For the present let us note merely that within four years the Covent Garden district was being energetically developed by the Earl of Bedford, who laid out a square, had a church built by Inigo Jones on the west, and erected open arcades, called piazzas, as fashionable residences on the north and south. After paying rent for eleven years, Dr. Lister finally bought the Milton property—in the year that John went on an expensive tour of the Continent. As for the other investment, the gentleman from Oxfordshire, Richard Powell, paid interest faithfully for nearly seventeen years—and John eventually met and married his daughter.[40]

We may be sure that the scrivener was now looking forward to a time when he could retire from his business, which continued active and prosperous.[41] At sixty-five he was probably depending more and more on his partner, young Bower. In 1626 he had been involved in a troublesome lawsuit brought by Dr. Samuel Burton, Archdeacon of Gloucester.[42] In 1627 he paid a fine rather than serve as Warden of the Scriveners Company, an honour which meant onerous responsibilities.[43] He had responsibilities enough, taking care of his own investments and those of his clients. Borrowers who defaulted brought him abuse and endless litigation. On the other hand, his acquaintance was now wide, and experience had taught him much about the financial quality of his customers. One of his oldest was John Cotton, uncle of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton. The shop in Bread Street had been visited by Sir Robert Heath, the prominent lawyer, and Sir Richard Molyneux, soon to be created first Viscount Maryborough. It had heard the booming voice of the handsome and dashing Sir Kenelm Digby. In search of loans, Sir George Horsey, Sir William Norris, and Sir William Sandys had come to visit him. Two other customers were Sir Francis Leigh, nephew of the Earl of Bridgewater and godson of Alice, Countess Dowager of Derby, and James Stanley, Lord Strange, a nephew of the Countess Dowager.[44] If these last borrowers were present, some years later, at the performance of *Arcades* or the masque of *Comus*, they must have marvelled at the talent displayed by a money-lender's son. Unless, of course, they had discovered that talent earlier and had told their kinsmen about it!

One of the scrivener's noble clients, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, founded a lectureship in history at Cambridge in 1627. It was a brave experiment, influenced no doubt by the advanced thinking of Bacon, but it was doomed to failure. On 7 and 12 December two lectures were given, on the *Annals* of Tacitus, by Dr. Isaac Dorislaus of Leyden, and in the opinion of some auditors they had an unfortunate applicability to modern events. Thomas Eden, Master of Trinity Hall, and Matthew Wren, Master of Peterhouse, objected to a continuation of the series. Wren wrote to Laud; Bainbridge, Master of Christ's and Vice-Chancellor during this year, forbade Dorislaus to lecture further. The prohibition was soon after revoked, then renewed at Laud's insistence by a royal injunction, then revoked again. Discouraged by the commotion, Lord Brooke decided to abandon the venture; and the study of history once more became a subject of no academic importance.[45]

In January 1628 the scrivener lost a grandchild; little Anne Phillips, only two years old, was buried on 22 January. Her bereaved mother was expecting another baby within a few months. Her uncle, the Cambridge undergraduate, who had recently composed verse memorials to four persons whom he scarcely knew, was prompted to write something appropriate to this family tragedy. The resultant poem was in English—

Milton's first attempt, so far as we know, at original composition in his native language. It was in English, not because the young poet was tiring of Latin or revising his views about media of expression, but simply because it was addressed to his sister Anne, who probably understood no Latin. Unlike the verses written for an undergraduate audience, this was also a poem to be shown to his mother, and by her, perhaps, to admiring neighbours and relatives.[46]

Flushed with his triumphs in Latin, Milton determined to make his English poem equally impressive. He would not use the simple couplet rimes of his childhood paraphrases of Psalms; instead, he selected the rime royal of Chaucer and Sackville and Shakespeare, only with the last line an alexandrine. Whether he invented this stanza, in an effort to imitate Spenser, or noticed some poem in which it had already been used, is difficult to say. He might have seen it, for example, in a manuscript copy of Phineas Fletcher's elegy on Sir Anthony Irby, written after Irby's death in 1625 but not published until 1633.[47] On the other hand, he could easily have derived it from the Spenserian stanza, just as Fletcher did. In any case, he set himself the task of composing the *Fair Infant* elegy in a complicated stanzaic form, with an unwieldy alexandrine to master at the end of every seven lines. He was feeling confident.

The poem suffers throughout from self-consciousness. It is a 'show-off' piece, in which consolation and comfort for the bereaved family are subordinated to learned allusions and elaborate figures of speech. It is almost devoid of personal feeling. Milton is composing a poem instead of using poetry to convey an emotion. He wrestles constantly with technical difficulties, producing bathetic alexandrines like 'And why from us so quickly thou didst take thy flight'. His effects of alliteration and assonance are often too obvious and sometimes grotesquely inept, as in the very first line: 'O fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted'. (Compare Spenser's blossom of youth that with 'sighs is blown away and blasted'.) The words chosen show little awareness of the simple and sorrowing audience to which they are presumably directed. The tone is heavy rather than tender, the consolation elaborately stylized. The dead infant is addressed rhetorically in all except the last stanza (which turns abruptly to the grieving mother), but we get no sense of the 'sweet' child as a personality. She is a primrose, a virgin sought in marriage by amorous Winter, a divine soul, a bright spirit, a star fallen from Olympus, a fugitive goddess, and so on. There are also references to Aquilo and Orithyia, Apollo and Hyacinth (a strangely inappropriate analogy!), which must have meant little or nothing to Milton's sister. The conceits are in far worse taste today than they would have appeared to the poet's contemporaries, but the ponderous explanation of Winter's kiss that killed could never, surely, have seemed very apposite to sensitive readers.

I strongly suspect that the last stanza was the first composed. Although its concluding promise is preposterous (was Milton thinking here of his own mother?), it contains one of the very few effective alexandrines in the whole poem, and thus may have determined the stanzaic form. It is the only stanza that expresses a motive for writing the poem, and yet it is not led up to, or introduced; it seems tacked on. If it was indeed written first (no manuscript has survived), then these faults are the more understandable, for the child had little personality that the rest of the poem could in any way reflect; with the human element disposed of, nothing remained but to try, by invoking literary associations, to make this death seem significant and important. The attempt fails.

Pointing out these defects is not to conclude that the sad mother found her brother's poem offensive or even unsympathetic. Whether it consoled her or not, it doubtless pleased her mightily, and made her more proud than ever of young John's talents. Indeed, whatever the poem's limitations, it represents an accomplishment, and has much interest for students of Milton's developing artistry. It is an ambitious first trial at English verse, showing the probable influence of Ovid, of Bion and Moschus, of Spenser and Shakespeare. It is a significant if unsuccessful attempt to blend pagan and Christian allegorizing. Many of its weaknesses were quickly recognized by its author and eliminated in subsequent experiments—a fact which warrants some attention being paid to them. One of the most remarkable of all the remarkable things about Milton as a poet is the speed with which he mastered technical problems. The next time he used the stanzaic form of the *Fair Infant* elegy was in the notably successful *Nativity Ode*, where the troublesome alexandrines are under perfect control. The next time he wrote on death was in the epitaphs on Hobson and the Marchioness of Winchester, where the *tone* is exactly right.

Moreover, the *Fair Infant* elegy has merits which help to explain the excellence of his subsequent poetry. There are phrases, such as 'the ruined roof of shaked Olympus', which show the beginnings of an individual and distinctive style. Immediately after the explosive 'blown but blasted' of the opening line comes the subtle music of 'Soft silken primrose fading timelessly'. One thinks not only of *In Quintum Novembris* but also *Paradise Lost* when he encounters bleak Winter 'mounting up in icy-pearlèd car / Through middle empire of the freezing air'. The perfect cadences of *Lycidas* seem more understandable when we find Milton writing at nineteen:

> There ended was his quest, there ceased his care.
> Down he descended from his snow-soft chair . . .

and

> Young Hyacinth born on Eurotas' strand,
> Young Hyacinth, the pride of Spartan land.

Milton learned early his characteristic tricks of echo and repetition, and also his peculiar fondness for sceptical parentheses:

> Resolve me then, O soul most surely blest
> (If so it be that thou these plaints dost hear),
> Tell me, bright spirit, where'er thou hoverest,
> Whether above that high first-moving sphere
> Or in the Elysian fields (if such there were).

It is possible at times to catch him in the very act of learning. Following the ornate conceit of Winter wooing the fair infant comes a line of slow and firm severity: 'Yet art thou not inglorious in thy fate'. He liked the sound of this so well that he repeated it in the very next stanza: 'Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead'. Milton's first original composition in English is self-conscious and experimental, but it contains the promise of rare music to come.[48]

We know very little about his specific activities at Cambridge during this period. At best we can notice a few events which were of interest to him. On 27 March 1628 his old tutor, Thomas Young, having given up his pastorship in Hamburg, was instituted to the united vicarages of St. Peter and St. Mary in Stowmarket, Suffolk, about forty miles from Cambridge.[49] Anne Phillips, still mourning the death of her baby daughter, gave birth to another, baptized Elizabeth on 9 April. At the University there was never any lack of local excitement. Bainbridge, Master of Christ's and Vice-Chancellor during the academic year 1627–8, was one of a number of doctors invited to preach the Lent sermons at Court. John Simson resigned his fellowship at Christ's, and in January was replaced by John Fenwick, who had graduated M.A. in 1625. Two comedies were performed at Trinity College at Shrovetide. In April, Robert Gell, a Fellow of Christ's, graduated B.D. Tovey had taken this degree during the preceding year, as had Alexander Gill. On 6 April a University preacher named Thomas Edwards was forced to recant sermons which he had preached at St. Andrew's church and which were regarded as subversive of all authority. Known as 'young Luther', Edwards was an impulsive zealot who considered himself divinely inspired; and Milton, who later called him 'shallow Edwards', may have formed his opinion early. Whether or not he heard services at St. Andrew's, Milton almost certainly went occasionally to Trinity church to hear the 'town sermon' preached on Sunday afternoons by such men as John Preston, Richard Sibbes, and Thomas Goodwin. The University sermon was preached at the same hour at Great St. Mary's, but at Trinity one could hear eloquent exposition of Calvinistic doctrine by the ablest of Puritan divines, and many students as well as townsfolk attended.[50]

As Milton began his fourth year at Cambridge, he was having new troubles in adjusting himself to university life. It was not an unsympathetic tutor this time, but fellow students, who for some reason failed to acknowledge his superior ability and to agree with his ideas. One suspects that after his quarrel with Chappell in 1626 he returned to College something of a hero, and gained additional admiration by his grateful outburst of poetry; but, if so, this experience encouraged rebellion rather than tolerance or compromise in his immature outlook. He later confessed that he was endowed with 'a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness, and self-esteem either of what I was or what I might be'. A person so endowed may command respect but not much affection. Yet Milton craved both affection and approval, and he groped, as young men will, toward ways of earning them. Anyone reading carefully through his published academic exercises will realize that their author was in open rebellion against the educational methods to which he was subjected at Cambridge. It is also clear that his views on reform, defiantly expressed, made him unpopular with some of his fellow students. On one occasion in 1628, when he anticipated hostility on the part of his audience, to his complete surprise, everyone, including those who had heretofore seemed most unfriendly, greeted his performance with unusual applause. This is his own account of what happened, and it is highly suggestive of his fumbling sincerity, his quick response to friendliness, his callow ignorance of human nature.[51]

His reaction to a nickname may be another instance of misjudging friendliness, although we know too little of the circumstances to be sure. Nicknames are informal tributes of recognition, sometimes cruel but often ironically affectionate. Milton seems not to have acquired one until his third or fourth year at Christ's. He was then, we may be sure, a conspicuous person in his College; he was also a handsome young man, of medium height, with attractive features, auburn hair, and pleasant eyes. His complexion was very fair, and this was the reason, his widow told Aubrey (having heard it from her husband), that he was called 'the Lady'. But sensitive to any suggestion of criticism, eager for unambiguous approval, Milton may have regarded the epithet with resentment—at least at first. His only preserved reference to the nickname was made in his Vacation Exercise of 1628, soon after he first heard it. It is inconceivable, however, that his widow regarded it as a slur or as evidence of unfriendliness; one must assume that her husband had told her the anecdote with a masculine chuckle.[52]

In July of 1628 two things happened which prove that the talents of 'the Lady of Christ's' were not unappreciated by his teachers or by his fellow students. At the Commencement, on 1 July, one of the Fellows of the College, perhaps Robert Gell, acted as Respondent in a philosophical disputation, and, following the custom of this important ceremony, distributed among his audience printed copies of verses on the theme of the disputation. These verses were composed by John Milton. Their true author enclosed a copy in a letter written the next day to young Alexander Gill, explaining, modestly, that he had composed the poem at high speed when the unnamed Fellow, long past the age for such trifles and occupied with serious business, had unexpectedly entrusted the task to his youthful efforts. Milton was not only pleased and flattered by this mostly anonymous distinction; he was also rather proud of the verses he had managed to produce. He sent them to Gill, knowing him to be, as he said, 'a very severe judge of poetry in general and a very candid critic of mine in particular'. He graciously invited Gill to send some of his own verses in return. Unfortunately, we know nothing more about the affair. We have not learned the name of the first mute inglorious Englishman who borrowed Milton's phrases, and the unusually scrupulous Milton may or may not have included among his acknowledged verses this piece of academic ghost-writing.[53]

His letter to Gill closed with the news that he intended to remain in Cambridge during the long summer vacation, living in retirement and making the most of a deeply literary leisure. He found in the University, he said sadly, almost no real companions in study. (Charles Diodati graduated M.A. from Oxford a few days later, but evidently the old friends contemplated no reunion during the summer.[54]) It was not long after he had written to Gill, and while he was still feeling a little sorry for himself, that Milton received a second unexpected invitation, more exciting and significant by far than a request to write a poem to order. He was asked to act as master of ceremonies for the annual Vacation Exercise of the College, a rowdy and carefree ritual staged by the students to celebrate the end of the academic year and all its restrictions.[55]

The success of this affair depended largely upon the choice of an eloquent and witty person to serve as master of ceremonies. Tradition, it would seem, had defined this student's role narrowly. He was to be known as 'Father' and other participants in the entertainment were to be his 'sons'. The programme was to begin with a rousing and rhetorical oration (in Latin, of course) upon some appropriate subject. This speech, part serious and part burlesque, was to be followed by a frivolous and unrhetorical speech by the 'Father', in which the humour was expected to be broad and the jokes both topical and masculine. Finally, the 'Father' was to introduce his 'sons', and other students were to join in whatever additional entertainment had been planned. The choice of John Milton for the leading part in this summer saturnalia is a most provocative fact in the poet's biography. Why was he selected? It does not matter whether he was chosen by a vote of his fellow students or, as he seems to imply in his oration, picked by someone whose responsibility it was ('*cujus interest*') to organize the ceremony. In either case his gifts of satire and wit and heavy, boisterous humour—too little recognized by later generations—must have been recognized by his contemporaries at Cambridge. Evidently Milton had displayed before then, as he certainly displayed many times later, the very qualities most fitting for an effective 'Father' of a Vacation Exercise—rare eloquence, pungent satire, a fondness for Latin puns, mock-seriousness, a gift for humorous and vigorous treatment of sex.[56]

He did his best to live up to expectations. He wanted to be liked, and here was an opportunity to amuse and entertain, to reveal himself a 'good fellow', to win the approval of all the students in his own College. It was, in fact, more than an opportunity; it was a challenge. The annual affair had not been held the preceding year. The real leader of the Sophisters, 'an eager candidate for the post' of master of ceremonies, had recently 'departed' as the result of a prank, and Milton was thus in the position of second choice. The summons came to him suddenly and unexpectedly. He thought that he was still disliked by various students, who called him 'the Lady'; moreover, he realized that 'some bearded Masters of crabbed and surly nature' were gravely opposed to the continuation of the Vacation Exercises. But Milton cast in his lot with custom, and made his bid for popularity. He did not try to purify the proceedings; he tried only to be funnier than his own abilities allowed. He was keenly aware of his limitations as a comedian, and this, more than anything else, seemed to worry him.[57]

Strenuous, candid, pathetic, robust, nervous, and naïve, Milton's Vacation Exercise in poetry and prose is one of the most moving and revealing of all his works. It shows him straining to be agreeable, ready and eager to compromise with his own scruples, ready to risk appearing ridiculous. He overwhelms his audience with flattery; he embarrasses it with self-analysis; he exhausts it with forced humour. The total effect must have been (to say the least) wearing. We do not know, alas, whether or not the performance was successful. But the spectacle of the Lady of Christ's in the role of Rabelais is enough to draw ironic tears down Pluto's cheek, and one hopes that Milton found something of the friendliness that he craved.

The part of Milton's speech which interests us here most particularly is the immediate sequel to the crude and boisterous jokes. He had exerted himself to please his audience; he had suppressed the fastidiousness of his own nature in order not to disappoint expectations. Now that audience, by way of return, must listen to him speak briefly in his own voice. He could not let the occasion pass, could not let so many listeners depart, without giving them a sample of his real abilities. His rhetorical excuse would be a preamble to introducing his 'sons'. Abruptly he concluded the Latin portion of the ceremony: 'Now I shall leap over the University statutes as though they were the wall of Romulus, and exchange Latin for English. Lend me attentive ears and minds, you whom such things amuse.' With this he surprised his audience by breaking into English verse, using the loose heroic couplets of the Sons of Ben Jonson:

> Hail, native language, that by sinews weak
> Didst move my first endeavouring tongue to speak . . .

Here I salute thee, and thy pardon ask
That now I use thee in my latter task: . . .
Thou needst not be ambitious to be first;
Believe me, I have thither packed the worst.

This tone of engaging jocularity provided a neat transition from the frivolous prose to the serious revelations of poetic ambition which he meant to make. As master of ceremonies his next business was to present, of course, the ten other students who were participating in the programme. Since they were impersonating nothing less than the ten Aristotelian categories of substance with its divers canons, they must be introduced in appropriate words, and language must not deny the speaker aid:

But haste thee straight to do me once a pleasure,
And from thy wardrobe bring thy chiefest treasure—
Not those new-fangled toys and trimming slight
Which takes our late fantastics with delight,
But cull those richest robes and gayest attire
Which deepest spirits and choicest wits desire.

With light irony he lingers a moment longer on the problem of decorum. His thoughts on the Aristotelian predicaments must be decked

in thy best array,
That so they may without suspect or fears
Fly swiftly to this fair assembly's ears.

But let the fair assembly listen, first, to a brief taste of his poetic powers. Let them hear the heroic themes upon which some day, perhaps, he would be writing:

Yet I had rather, if I were to choose,
Thy service in some graver subject use,
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round
Before thou clothe my fancy in fit sound:
Such where the deep transported mind may soar
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door
Look in, and see each blissful Deity
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings
To th' touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings
Immortal nectar to her kingly sire:
Then passing through the spheres of watchful fire
And misty regions of wide air next under
And hills of snow and lofts of pilèd thunder,
May tell at length how green-eyed Neptune raves,
In Heaven's defiance mustering all his waves;
Then sing of secret things that came to pass
When beldam Nature in her cradle was;
And last of kings and queens and heroes old . . .

Convivial, callow students with no thoughts beyond the coming vacation sat at their tables and listened to the speaker. This was an item not on the programme. What they thought, we shall not try to guess. But for slightly more than a minute Milton stood there, his singing robes about him, giving them a glimpse of the future. Then:

> But fie, my wandering muse, how thou dost stray!
> Expectance calls thee now another way.

There was more poetry. The boy impersonating the first of the Aristotelian categories was introduced in witty verse, which included a dozen lines of 'metaphysical' paradoxes; and finally an undergraduate named Rivers was presented to the audience in a poetical passage reminiscent of the topographical verse of Spenser and Michael Drayton. The rest was prose.[58]

Milton's verses *At a Vacation Exercise* are a remarkable exhibition of virtuosity. They were designed to display his talents, and they do so, admirably. Critics, over-conscious of *Paradise Lost*, tend to notice only the list of 'subjects for poetry', and a few commentators have ascribed to Milton a clarity and definiteness of intention in this period which the passage does not warrant. He was not then planning to write an epic. He was merely reacting in characteristic fashion to an uncongenial task, and was seeking a poetical antidote to the ribaldry of the occasion. More significant than the subject matter of the 'epic' passage are its tone and technique. Using the easy, graceful heroic couplets of Jonson and his followers, a style perfect for occasional verse and informal poetizing, Milton begins lightly, almost carelessly. He dares, for example, a double redundancy in the lines:

> Driving *dumb silence* from the portal door
> Where he had *mutely* sat two years before.

His tone is half-playful, at moments gently ironic. He devotes a dozen lines to the subject of decorum, his expected introduction of the other speakers in mind. Then, suddenly, his tone changes, and the Jonsonian line moves more slowly, with unaccustomed weight. The rhythms hold steady, but richer, deeper sounds are heard. The thought becomes too large for the neat couplets, and grammatical constructions overpass the tidy rimes. Milton calls our attention to what he is doing:

> Before thou clothe my fancy *in fit sound*:
> Such where the deep transported mind may soar
> Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door
> Look in . . .

It is a display of sheer technical skill, a piece of verbal orchestration ending with a *bravura* passage in which the strings fairly sing:

> Such as the wise Demodocus once told
> In solemn songs at King Alcinous' feast

> While sad Ulysses' soul and all the rest
> Are held with his melodious harmony
> In willing chains and sweet captivity.

This completed, Milton returns to the facile, occasional tone with which his audience was most familiar. But only for a minute. Next he tightens up the line and strips the language to make half a dozen couplets bear the weight of Donnean paradoxes:

> O'er all his brethren he shall reign as king,
> Yet everyone shall make him underling,
> And those that cannot live from him asunder
> Ungratefully shall strive to keep him under;
> In worth and excellence he shall outgo them,
> Yet being above them, he shall be below them;
> From others he shall stand in need of nothing,
> Yet on his brothers shall depend for clothing . . . .

There is still more. Changing his manner again, but still using the heroic couplet, he offers a brief catalogue of English rivers as a final flourish. Inviting remembrance of the *Faerie Queene* and *Poly-Olbion*, this catalogue is remarkable for its highly condensed allusions and descriptions; it is considerably more than a list of names:

> Rivers, arise; whether thou be the son
> Of utmost Tweed, or Ouse, or gulfy Dun,
> Or Trent, who like some earth-born giant spreads
> His thirty arms along th' indented meads,
> Or sullen Mole that runneth underneath,
> Or Severn swift, guilty of maiden's death,
> Or rocky Avon, or of sedgy Lea,
> Or coaly Tyne, or ancient hallowed Dee,
> Or Humber loud that keeps the Scythian's name,
> Or Medway smooth, or royal towered Thame.

In his *Vacation Exercise* verses Milton proves that he has been reading English poetry with the eye of a craftsman. He gives subtlety and variety to a common verse form. He had not used the heroic couplet since his schoolboy paraphrase of Psalm 114, unless there were trial poems later discarded. The *Vacation Exercise* is, moreover, an ambitious piece, his longest English poem to date, and longer than any Latin poem except *In Quintum Novembris* and the *Elegia Quarta*. It is not, of course, truly a 'poem'—not an artistic whole—and it means little apart from its academic context. Perhaps that is why Milton did not include it in the 1645 edition of his *Poems*.

One cannot help wondering what effect Milton's participation in the Vacation Exercise had upon his mind and temperament. In the closing years of his life he printed both the poem and the prose speeches, but nowhere does he comment upon the occasion when, striving to be sociable and co-operative, he lent himself to ribaldry and coarseness. The applause may have been sweet to his ears, but it probably troubled his conscience. He was, let us not forget, still planning to be a minister of God. In his letter to Gill of 2 July 1628 he had vigorously expressed his disillusion with the university training of clergymen: 'There are only one or two among us who do not take their flight to theology before they are even fledged, almost untrained and uninitiated in philology and philosophy. Even of theology they are satisfied with a mere smattering, if it seems enough to help them patch together a little sermon out of other men's scraps. It is so bad that there is a serious danger of our clergy gradually lapsing into the popish ignorance of bygone days.' Fourteen years later he recalled his disgust at the spectacle of these ministerial students participating in low comedies:

> when in the colleges so many of the young divines, and those in next aptitude to divinity, have been seen so oft upon the stage writhing and unboning their clergy limbs to all the antic and dishonest gestures of Trinculos, buffoons, and bawds—prostituting the shame of that ministry which either they had, or were nigh having, to the eyes of courtiers and court-ladies with their grooms and mademoiselles. There while they acted, and overacted, among other young scholars I was a spectator. They thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools; they made sport, and I laughed; they mispronounced, and I misliked; and, to make up the atticism, they were out, and I hissed.[59]

When he made this indictment, the former Lady of Christ's skirted a possible confession of his own sins; he had never acted in a comedy, but he had once sacrificed his ideals of conduct on the smoky altar of sociability.

His original plan of spending a quiet summer at Cambridge had an additional interruption, presumably a pleasant one. He had written to Thomas Young, expressing, no doubt, his delight at having his erstwhile tutor back in England and his hope for an early reunion. After some delay, Young had replied, inviting Milton to visit him at Stowmarket. On 21 July 1628 John sent a note of acceptance.[60] The letter, in Latin, is brief, modest, and very respectful; it speaks, rather tantalizingly, of many recent kindnesses from Young; it says nothing about the Commencement poem or the Vacation Exercise speeches and verse. But it does contain a pun: Milton will be glad to retire from the noise of town to Young's Stoa of the Iceni. The Stoa or porch which fronted on the marketplace at Athens had given its name to the Stoic philosophers who taught there: and having made his little joke about a British Stoa, Milton praised Young for his stoical life at Stowmarket. This part of the letter strongly suggests that Milton regarded his late attempts at undergraduate humour as highly successful.

In the peaceful countryside of Suffolk, Thomas Young and his nineteen-year-old guest probably discussed the politics of the day.[61] King Charles, influenced by his favourite, Buckingham, had been carrying on a disastrous war with France. Lacking both money and popular support, he had been forced to summon Parliament, which had promptly seized the opportunity to make demands of their own. Outraged by recent abuses of arbitrary government, the fearless Puritan squires who met in the Commons on 17 March had soon agreed to risk everything for a stirring ideal—the right of every Englishman to free enjoyment of property and person within the limits of established law. Brushing aside all matters which might confuse the great issue, the House had quickly drawn up a Petition of Right, covering martial law, billeting, arbitrary taxation, and arbitrary imprisonment. It was offered, with a bribe of five subsidies, to the annoyed King, who had to decide between dissolving Parliament and accepting the disagreeable terms. On 7 June he assented to the Petition, and all England rejoiced. Four days later, the emboldened Commons prayed for the removal of the detested Buckingham, and the King, to protect his friend once more, prorogued Parliament.

At Cambridge, men were still of two minds about the Duke. His despotism was obviously dangerous, yet he was a friendly Chancellor of the University, and the University expected much from him, including a new library. On 23 August, however, all such partisan hopes were blasted. Buckingham was assassinated. While the King mourned, most of his subjects rejoiced. In London streets citizens drank the health of the murderer, John Felton, as the hero of the hour. Ballads were composed describing him as a national benefactor. Someone cried, 'God bless thee, little David!' as he was carried to prison. A single blow with a tenpenny dagger had succeeded where Parliament had failed, and, brutal as the deed had been, its consequences brought joy.

Talk became very free; a long pent-up discontent with arbitrary and incompetent rule found welcome expression. On the first day of September, in the wine-cellar of Trinity College, Oxford, a group of old friends were exhilarated by the contents of the place and the news of the past week. One of them, despite warnings from a cautious companion, permitted himself some loud, unguarded remarks on the King's intelligence, the warmth of the Duke's present surroundings, and the courage of Felton's deed. The excited speaker was Milton's friend, young Alexander Gill. Unfortunately, one of his auditors—reported to be Laud's godson, William Chillingworth—soon informed against him to the Bishop. Three days later Gill was arrested, examined, and then kept close prisoner at the Gatehouse while his fate was being decided. Rooms were searched; a subversive poem and many incriminating letters were found; some additional arrests were made. When the sentence of the Star Chamber finally came, on 6 November, it was very severe. Gill was to be committed to Fleet prison during the King's pleasure, fined £2,000, degraded from the ministry, and deprived of his academic degrees. Before going to prison, he was condemned to stand for a day in the pillory at Westminster and have one ear cut off; then, on another day, he was to suffer the same punishment at Oxford. Gill's father, now sixty-four, pleaded for some softening of this sentence, and Edward Sackville, Earl of Dorset, also seems to have interceded. Before 22 November, it was known in Cambridge, where Milton must have waited anxiously for the tidings, that the victim of loose talk had been degraded and was still imprisoned, but that his ears were intact, his fine mitigated.[62]

When Parliament met again, on 20 January 1629, they had many new grievances to redress. The King had ignored the Petition of Right; Laud, promoted Bishop of London, was quietly taking the place of Buckingham as the man behind the throne; in November there had been a Declaration forbidding all further discussion in the press or pulpit, or in the universities, of the meaning of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. In effect, theological and doctrinal controversy was banned. The House of Commons, however, quickly resolved itself into a Committee of Religion, asserting its right to consider such questions. Among others, the member for Huntingdon, one Oliver Cromwell, made a bitter speech. It was by now clear to the aroused Commons that the High Church protégés of the Court were bent upon the destruction of Puritanism in England, and their obvious policy was to strike before being struck. Attempting to dictate an equitable theory of doctrine and discipline, they were, of course, asserting by implication the sovereignty of Parliament—a notion strange to the Constitution and thoroughly repugnant to Charles and his prelatical advisers. The radical and rebellious nature of their proceedings was dramatized on 2 March when they locked the doors, held down the frightened Speaker in his chair, and passed three resolutions by acclamation. Eight days later, they were dissolved by an angry king. It was the last Parliament in England for more than eleven years.[63]

Milton was afterwards to speak, in a sonnet, of 'the sad breaking of that Parliament' of 1629. At the time, however, he was very preoccupied with the examinations and exercises required of candidates for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. The character of these examinations and exercises reflected the still medieval emphasis of the University upon skill in disputation. From their freshman year Cambridge boys were trained to argue, in Latin, on any subject (the subjects were unimportant) according to traditional, well-defined techniques of ancient logic and rhetoric. They were trained to give classical illustrations, to overwhelm their opponents with reputable authorities, and to embellish their learned bickering with graceful allusions. Conviction was irrelevant; one must be prepared to debate either side of a question. Reason and common sense were also irrelevant, for, in practice, success in argument depended upon one's effective use of the established techniques. The best students were those who had mastered the techniques and had, besides, a wealth of reading to draw upon. Milton's first tutor at Cambridge, William Chappell, was famed because he had once caused an opponent to faint by pushing him hard in disputation. Near the close of the century Aubrey gave this illuminating sketch of another notable product of the old system: 'He did walk much in the College grove, and there contemplate, and meet with some cod's-head or other, and dispute with him and baffle him. He thus prepared himself beforehand. He would always be disputing; so would my tutor. I think it was an epidemic evil of that time, which I think now is grown out of fashion as unmannerly and boyish. He was the readiest and nimblest disputant of his time in the University; perhaps none has equalled him since.' Such was the ideal at which Milton's four years of undergraduate instruction had been directed.[64]

After much practice before his tutor, and before the students of Christ's assembled in the College hall, Milton was ready for the crucial exercises in the Lent term of 1629. First, he had to keep two 'Responsions' and two 'Opponencies' in the Schools. For the Responsions he submitted a list of three propositions which he would defend in debate, and the Proctor then named three Sophisters (upperclassmen) from other colleges to appear as Opponents to each thesis chosen. He himself was thus named as an Opponent to two other Respondents, and he participated, therefore, in four separate 'Acts'. These completed, he was further examined by his own College and sent up as a 'Quaestionist' or candidate for the degree, to be examined in the Regent House by the Proctors, Posers, and others in the week before Ash Wednesday week (in 1629, 9–12 February). One of the two Proctors in this year was a Fellow of Christ's, Michael Honywood. Next, furnished by his College with a *supplicat*,[65] he and all the other candidates went again to the Schools, to 'enter their Priorums'. This process, which occurred on a day before Ash Wednesday (18 February), consisted of each candidate's proposing and answering some question out of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. Subsequently, Milton became a 'Determiner' and stood *in quadragesimâ*, with a final set of exercises to go through. At last, on 26 March, the Thursday before Palm Sunday, the probation ended, he signed the three Articles of Religion in the University subscription books, and he was pronounced a Bachelor of Arts. The Lent term ended the next day.[66]

Graduation in 1629 was something of a triumph for Milton, for his tutor, and for his College. In the University's honours list, the *ordo senioritatis*, his was the fourth name; among the twenty-four graduates thus distinguished, Christ's College had four (only St. John's having an equal number), but, among them, Milton was the only pupil of Nathaniel Tovey. John Boutflower and Thomas Baldwin, pupils of Alsop, were in twelfth and fifteenth place respectively; and Richard Buckenham, pupil of Scot, was in fourteenth place. Christ's College had not been represented on the lists of 1626 and 1627, and was not to be represented on the 1630 list. Of the 259 incepting bachelors in 1629, only three were officially recognized as having been superior to Milton in performance: Henry Hutton of St. John's, Edward Kempe of Queens', and John Ravenscroft of Trinity. The world was to hear nothing further of these three.[67]

The exercises for graduation were prescribed by the Elizabethan statutes of 1561, which also prescribed the exercises for the Master of Arts degree involving three Responsions in the Schools, two in the College, and one College oration. It so happens that, in the last year of his life, Milton was persuaded to publish a few of the many academic exercises which he had composed and memorized as a student at Cambridge. He chose seven. One was the Vacation Exercise which I have discussed earlier; the others consisted of three Responsions in the Schools, two in the College, and one College oration—precisely the work required for the M.A. degree. The compositions published are undated and unnumbered; there is nothing to prove that they are his M.A. exercises; but in the absence of evidence to the contrary it seems reasonable to suppose that Milton chose to print, not his undergraduate efforts, but his more mature work. Hence, we shall consider these pieces in due course.[68]

Milton's last term as an undergraduate must have had overtones of sadness. Gill was in prison; little John Phillips, his sister's first child, died at the age of four, and was buried on 15 March;[69] Parliament had been dissolved, and the political future looked dark indeed. Nevertheless, if the new Bachelor of Arts looked back, he was able to count many blessings. His twenty years had been rich in social and intellectual experience. He had quarrelled with his tutor, had returned to London, and yet had graduated with twenty-eight of his College classmates. He had suffered unpopularity, had acquired a nickname, and yet had received the hearty applause of those he had thought his enemies. He had read widely—in ancient and modern literatures. He had composed a good deal in both verse and prose which he carefully preserved. He had also made friends.

By March of 1629 Milton was well acquainted with the busy microcosm which was Christ's College. He was on very cordial terms with some of the Fellows,[70] and probably knew most of the students by sight, if not by name. There were persons worth knowing among his contemporaries; some of them were to play a considerable part in the world. But just as no crystal ball existed to foretell for them the fame of *Paradise Lost*, so Milton had to judge these boys—as they of course judged him—by the criteria of character and personality which seem important to youth. There were future Cavaliers and future Roundheads among them, future Anglican preachers and future Independents. London churches were to see about two dozen of them as curates or rectors. Many became schoolmasters, and several migrated to New England. There were future poets and pamphleteers, future statesmen and legislators. Because most of them contributed to Milton's views of human nature, because some of them must have been his friends, it may be interesting to place a few in the full perspective of history. We cannot say what he thought of them, or what they thought of him; we can only name their names and take a fleeting look forward.

Three of Milton's contemporaries at Christ's—Robert Chestlin, George Ecoppe, and Robert Pory—were ejected from London churches by the Puritan revolution. Pory, a classmate from St. Paul's School, was showered with honours after the Restoration, becoming Archdeacon of Middlesex. John Shaw, who became a Puritan before taking his degree at Cambridge, lived to preach frequently before Cromwell. Richard Jackson became a member of the Presbyterian *Classis*. Samuel Bolton, a classmate, was a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (against which Milton was to rail), and succeeded Bainbridge as Master of Christ's. John Hieron, another classmate, was a Puritan ejected after the Restoration. Samuel Torshell was appointed by Parliament tutor to the younger children of King Charles.

William Boteler and Thomas Bate both died fighting for the King in 1644. Charles Lucas became a famous cavalry leader, fought for his royal master at Marston Moor, and was shot after the surrender of Colchester in 1648. Justinian Isham lent money to Charles and suffered imprisonment for his loyalty. Andrew Halford led a troop of horse raised by his father, Sir Richard, took a party of parliamentarians prisoner, and hanged them all. Later, taken prisoner himself, he saved his life by a fabulous ransom. Edward Hartop, on the other hand, raised a regiment for the Parliament. Henry Massingberd was created a baronet by Cromwell, and his brother Drayner was a colonel in the parliamentary army.

Edward King, to be immortalized as 'Lycidas', had been admitted on 9 June 1626. John Cleveland, later famous as a poet and a satirist, entered on 4 September 1627. William Herries, the intimate friend of Richard Crashaw, was one year senior to Milton. William Hawkins had graduated M.A. in 1626 and was already, in 1629, known as the author of *Apollo Shroving*, a lyrical drama. Hamon L'Estrange became famous as a theologian and an historian, writing, among other things, a pamphlet against Smectymnuus. Francis Gouldman became an editor and lexicographer. Humphrey Otway fathered Thomas, the dramatist.

The paths of Milton and his College contemporaries later crossed in strange ways. The father of George Downham was to license one of Milton's pamphlets addressed to Parliament. One of the members of that Parliament was William Ellis, who became Solicitor-General under both the Cromwells. Another was Luke Robinson, two years junior to Milton at Christ's, who became an original member of the republican Council of State and voted for John Milton's appointment as its Secretary for Foreign Languages.

# 3. Cambridge, 1629–1632

As a Bachelor of Arts working toward the M.A. degree Milton had more freedom and more privileges than he had enjoyed as an undergraduate. The residence requirement had been considerably relaxed since the statutes of 1561, and he was welcome to come and go much as he pleased. The academic requirements, in our somewhat clouded perspective, seem vague and few. The three years ahead held, therefore, the promise of real intellectual and literary productivity. At their close he might, if an appropriate vacancy existed, be elected a Fellow of his College.[1] In any case, after seven additional years he could apply for the B.D. degree. Such was the prospect open to clever students, and it often led, Milton knew, to ecclesiastical preferment and other rewards. Meanwhile, he was expected to continue his studies, increase his skill at disputation, and prepare himself for the 'Acts' required for the Master's degree. If he wished to travel, or to study away from the University, he seems to have been at liberty to do so.[2]

In April of 1629, only a few weeks after graduating B.A., Milton returned to poetry. His *Elegia Quinta* is both a welcome to spring and a welcome to the reviving spirit of verse within him.[3] Nothing that he had previously written, unless it be moments of *In Quintum Novembris*, throbs with more youthful exuberance and sheer vitality. It is a conventional treatment of a conventional subject, but the *Elegia Quinta* vibrates, nevertheless, with poetic energy. Longer than the verse-letter to Young, longer indeed than anything he had hitherto composed except the ambitious Gunpowder Plot poem, it is proof apparent of creative power resurgent.

The poem begins: 'Time, turning in perpetual cycle, calls back fresh Zephyrs, now, in the growing warmth of spring. Earth, her strength renewed, puts on brief youth and the thawing soil puts forth gentle green. Am I mistaken, or do not my own powers of song also return? Is inspiration again with me at the gift of spring? By the spring's grace it is with me! Once more—who could believe it?—it cries for some employment!' These lines, self-conscious and rhetorical though they sound, are something more than pretty convention, as the event proves. The poet had composed nothing *on his own initiative* for a long time, and the urge to write was quite genuine. It was genuine enough, in fact, to carry him through 140 vigorous hexameters and pentameters. The familiar feeling of release that follows academic labours successfully terminated may well account for the poem in part. But there is more. The subject is a new one for this student of theology, this prospective minister. Milton writes here with almost pagan fervour, which is something different from enthusiastic use of mythology. Line 8 should warn us: *poscit opus* (an Ovidian echo) implies a returning potency not altogether poetical.

Looked at from one point of view, the *Elegia Quinta* is a remarkable patchwork of semi-learned allusions, kept always on the level of the library shelf and never descending to the personal or topical or contemporary. It celebrates an English spring glimpsed through the window of Ovid. Its energy and vitality thus seem the energy and vitality of a scholar who has just closed a book with satisfaction. Contrasted with the word-pictures of Chaucer or Breton, or even Surrey, Milton's *In adventum veris* may strike the casual reader as pedantic and unreal. The poem never gets outdoors except in the artificial world of myth and legend. It is April felt in a study. The new leaves fanned by Zephyr are leaves of a well-thumbed volume.

But after the Platonic beginning, after the first forty lines, Milton's verses venture to interpret the springtime in terms of awakening sex; and, having once broached this fascinating and disturbing subject, the poet cannot leave it. What begins as praise of a season turns into a song of earth's fecundity. For forty lines a wanton world is described as shamelessly making love to the sun, and the remainder of the poem, in a breathless series of illustrations, shows the children of earth animated by vernal frenzy. A high, nervous excitement pervades the verses as the imagery becomes more and more frankly sensual. The earth breathes passion and voluptuously bares her fertile breasts. Cupid seeks the seduction of even the chaste Diana and Vesta. Maidens with virgin breasts go forth to the pleasures of spring. Satyrs and lustful fauns dart through flowery fields in search of lovely victims. An ever-memorable nymph flees to protect her chastity, and, fleeing, hopes to be overtaken.

For a theological student of twenty, and the future author of *Comus*, the *Elegia Quinta* is a pleasantly incongruous performance. It serves to remind us, if we need reminding, that Milton was once a young man and in some very human respects was not different from other young men. Its opening invites us to lofty Olympus, but when we arrive there, we are shown a bed. Indeed, there are several references to beds in the poem, together with a good amount of breasts, perfume, and heavy breathing. The poem may be conventional and bookish in its timeless trappings, but in some ways it is one of the most intensely personal of all Milton's verses. Underneath the academic gown is a boy bordering on manhood and excited by thoughts of sex. The talk about Cupid and beautiful girls and spring in the *Elegia Prima* to Charles Diodati had been adolescent boasting and innocent day-dreaming; superficially more realistic than the *Elegia Quinta*, it had evidenced none of the tension and excitement of the later poem—certainly none of the restless joy in sensual imagination. Milton's hymn to fertility might well have caused some concern to a father who had solemnly dedicated his child to the Church. If and when it was shown to him, he may have worried for the first time about his son's 'strange' addiction to poetry.

But his son, exulting in the return of inspiration, had further writing on his mind. The April mood which caused him to pen the *Elegia Quinta* had also, we may believe, set him to reading love-poetry in Latin and Italian and English. Perhaps it was in this year that he re-read one day the graceful Fifth Ode of Horace, *Ad Pyrrham*, and conceived the idea of translating it into English verse word for word.[4] Like other Renaissance poets before him, he felt the challenge of trying to convert a Latin measure into the rhythms of his native language. His schoolmaster, Alexander Gill the elder, had argued that the idiom of English forbade the writing of quantitative poetry, though he approved the writing of English accentual verse after the Latin pattern. In any case, rime would have to be discarded:

> What slender youth bedewed with liquid odours
> Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,
>    Pyrrha? For whom bind'st thou
>    In wreaths thy golden hair?

This was like his own picture of wanton Earth, with flowers in her flowing hair, wooing Phoebus to a couch of roses. The remainder of the Ode, with its nautical image of love's fickleness, had its fascination for a youth as yet inexperienced in amorous ways. Glowing and memorable verses could obviously be made from passion unrequited. He had been reading a great deal of such verse. Some day he might be writing it himself.

Milton's translation of the Fifth Ode is a much overpraised poem. At best it is a *tour de force*, an approximation of the admittedly impossible. But to this one admirer of the poet's skill it fails to catch the tone of the original and, worse, is poor poetry in its own right. How many of its eulogists have tried reading it aloud? It says almost (not exactly) what the original says (*simplex munditiis* is untranslatable), but it is sadly lacking in the grace and ease and elegance of the Latin. It has music of a sort: intentionally or otherwise it makes pleasant use of assonance; yet the words are marshalled, they do not flow. If it were not a somewhat literal translation of a famous poem, done by another famous poet, probably few people would ever read it with enjoyment. Milton could have done a finer job of capturing the spirit of *Ad Pyrrham* in a loose paraphrase.

Whatever one's critical opinion, the young man's rendering of an Horatian ode into English is noteworthy in several respects. It was his first experiment with unrimed verse, an experiment not repeated until *Comus*. He made no further attempts, so far as we know, at translating Latin poetry (work which savoured of schoolboy assignments), and no further trials of Latin measures in terms of English rhythms. His choice of this particular ode for translation exhibits, with the *Elegia Quinta*, a dramatic change from his previous interests. Only five years separate this effort from his two paraphrases of Psalms (if I have correctly assigned the Fifth Ode to 1629), but in that short period an apprentice poet has grown into a journeyman, a boy has become a man. He doubtless felt himself to be an entirely different person and, in a real sense, of course he was. Many of his ideas were in process of changing too. But he was still a student in training for the ministry.[5]

Meanwhile he was reading and enjoying the Italian sonneteers, Dante and Petrarch in particular. No hint survives that he was yet aware of sonnets written in English. Eager to add Italian to his other linguistic accomplishments, he seems to have discovered the sonnet form in the language of its origin, and noted, with pleasure, that its principal theme was love. Love-poetry was by now his favourite reading. Not yet confident enough to try versification in Italian, he resolved to attempt this Italian form in his native language.[6] If his decision was preceded by trial paraphrases of several Italian sonnets—as seems altogether possible—no such experiments were preserved and later published.

In any case, Milton learned that writing a sonnet involved difficulties. For one thing, he had no Laura or Beatrice to address his verses to (and the uncompromising candour of his temperament may have forbidden his inventing one). He could, however, wish for a beautiful mistress and hope that, when he found her, he might escape the 'hopeless doom' which the lovers of Pyrrha suffered in Horace's ode. At twenty, and in the 'propitious' month of May, he felt ripe for love. The nightingale which he had recently described singing in his *Elegia Quinta* portended (he had read somewhere)[7] success in affairs of the heart. The nightingale's song brought success, but the song of the cuckoo, if heard before that of the nightingale, brought disappointment. Here was his theme for a sonnet—and to get the first two lines of the poem he simply translated into English what he had already written about the nightingale in Latin:

> O nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
> Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
> Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
> While the jolly Hours lead on propitious May.
> Thy liquid notes that close the eye of Day
> First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill
> Portend success in love. O if Jove's will
> Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,
> Now timely sing . . .

Milton's first attempt at the sonnet form is more interesting as an illustration of his state of mind than as a poem. As we have already seen, highly formal verse can also be highly personal. The boy who expressed in elegiac metre his undisguised excitement at thoughts of love-making in the springtime now hopes openly for participation in such joys. Moreover, the writing of poetry has become identified, in his thinking, with amorous passion. The fifth elegy, let it be noted, began as a poem about writing a poem. So the nightingale, traditionally the bird of love, becomes also at the close of the sonnet the 'mate' of the Muse:

> Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,
> Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

This ending, so careless of structure with its introduction of a new idea which is not developed, tells us much of Milton's mental processes.

We know nothing of his whereabouts during the spring, summer, and autumn of 1629. He may have spent most of that time at Cambridge, studying. He may have spent some of it with Charles Diodati, visiting to and fro, or travelling in a holiday spirit to interesting parts of England. Although direct evidence is lacking, we may well believe that these boys were together whenever occasion offered. By chance, two of Diodati's letters to Milton have survived; they are in Greek, and undated, but they probably typify a number of letters, now lost, which the young Oxonian sent his companion during this and other periods.[8] One of them deals with an excursion of some sort:

> The present state of the weather seems to continue hostile to our recent plan, for it has been stormy and unsettled two whole days. Still, I crave your company so much that, wishfully, I dream of fair weather and all but prophesy a calm, golden day tomorrow, letting us enjoy learned and philosophical discourse together. I decided to write you, therefore, to invite and encourage you before you turn your mind to other things, despairing of sunshine and recreation for a while. Cheer up, my friend; hold to our plan and put on a holiday mood, gayer than today merits. All will be fine tomorrow—the air, sun, river, trees, birds, earth, and men will laugh and (I mean no offence) *dance* with us as we make holiday. But be ready to start when called, or come to me uncalled—'For Menelaus of the loud war-cry came to him unbidden'.

In his mind Milton probably completed with a smile this quotation from the *Iliad*: '. . . for he knew in his heart how his brother toiled.'

Although we can assign them with confidence to no specific time, these two letters from Diodati are a priceless clue to the quality of the friendship between him and Milton. In the letter just quoted, a suggestion of teasing —or is it masculine humour?—occurs in the parenthesis near the close. This teasing, and this humour, are quite apparent in the second message which has survived:

> The only thing I can complain of in my present way of life is the lack of a kindred spirit to give and take understandingly of conversation. I miss such a person, though here in the country all other enjoyments abound. For what more does one want when days are long, the landscape fair with flowers, everything waving and teeming with leaves, on every branch a nightingale or goldfinch or

> some other bird warbling and singing, a variety of walks, a table neither scanty nor overloaded, and peaceful sleep? If I could add to these a good companion, learned and knowing, I would be happier than the king of Persia. But one always lacks something in this life; hence the need for moderation.
>
> But you—you amazing person—why do you scorn Nature's gifts? Why persist in poring over books and papers all day and all night without excuse? Live, laugh, make the most of Youth and the hours as they pass; and stop studying the activities and recreations and indolences of the sages of old, wearing yourself out in the process. In everything else inferior to you, I seem to myself—and am—your superior in one thing: that I know a measure to my labours. Goodbye, and have fun, but not like Sardanapalus in Soli.

Diodati's conclusion is a learned, elaborate, and somewhat naughty joke. The Greek word for 'play' or 'have fun' can also mean 'play amorously'; and Sardanapalus connotes lust and effeminacy. The Athenian colonists of Soli, a coast-town of Cilicia, were famed for a different kind of corruption, the corruption of the Attic dialect; hence the word 'Soli' connotes barbarisms, solecisms, and incorrect writing of any kind. What Diodati said, in effect, was: 'Have fun, but don't be an old lecher—and watch your grammar!' This is affectionate teasing aimed at Milton's congenital seriousness and also at his moral and literary fastidiousness.

One thinks better of Milton for loving a person who poked fun at him occasionally, and whose 'mirth and Attic salt' were truly appreciated. When Diodati was incorporated in the M.A. degree at Cambridge on 7 July 1629 Milton can hardly have failed to be present;[9] and if they decided to take a trip somewhere afterwards, the scrivener's son was able to afford it. The records of his father's business which have been found show him buying and selling real estate in this particular year. On 19 June Alexander Dorington of Gray's Inn and his wife Mary bought for £300 a house and garden in Aldersgate Street which the scrivener owned.[10] A little later, on 18 July, Milton senior purchased for £560 some property on Ludgate Hill which had once been the home of Sir John Suckling and his family.[11] The indenture was signed by William Barrett, executor of Sir John's will, but not by young John Suckling, the son and heir, who was then travelling on the Continent. The scrivener's son may have known this dashing and talented young man as a fellow-commoner at Trinity College, Cambridge, for a few years. They were about the same age.[12]

The biographer of Milton is haunted by the thought that his author, as an impressionable youth, may have come into personal contact with a number of other poets in this very lyrical century; yet it is impossible to prove anything beyond possibilities. Shakespeare almost certainly visited the Mermaid Tavern while little John Milton was playing in the house on Bread Street barely a stone's throw away, but Shakespeare died when Milton was seven, and the possibility of a chance encounter is the stuff that romantic daydreams are made on. Donne, on the other hand, became

Dean of St. Paul's (1621) while Milton was a student in the adjoining School, and the young Pauline may well have trooped with Mr. Gill and his 'army' of 'little myrmidons' to hear the great man preach. George Herbert, although he was University Orator during Milton's first few years at Cambridge, was seldom there; he married in 1629, and having already taken Holy Orders, he soon became the devoted rector of Bemerton. In the autumn of 1629, Robert Herrick said a lyrical farewell to sack, and left his beloved London for Dean Prior in 'the loathèd West'. George Wither, England's Juvenal in the opinion of Mr. Gill, was much in London, in or out of Marshalsea prison. Jonson was also there of course, perhaps the best known poet in the metropolis, although chafing, in 1629, over the reception of the *New Inn*, his latest play. Francis Quarles, having studied at Christ's College and published a half-dozen books of verse, was now serving as private secretary to Archbishop Ussher in Dublin. Richard Crashaw and Richard Lovelace were pupils at the Charterhouse, and that precocious child, Abraham Cowley, was already writing verse at eleven years of age. Edmund Waller, only a few years older than Milton, was in 1629 a veteran of several parliaments. Still alive were Michael Drayton, John Marston, George Chapman, and Edward Fairfax; and London was not so large that a young poet found it impossible to meet the famous masters of his art if he desired to do so. Milton, unfortunately, left us no account of any such meetings; and we gain nothing by imagining them.

We are on surer grounds when we discuss his acquaintance with the immortal dead. Some of the books from Milton's personal library have survived, and his earliest known purchase dates from 1629.[13] In December of 1629 he bought for only tenpence a copy of the sonnets of Giovanni della Casa, a book that was to influence the technique of his own efforts at writing sonnets.[14]

On 9 December 1629 the poet celebrated his twenty-first birthday. He had come of age, and, the following Christmas, he composed an ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, a joyous, image-filled, genuinely religious poem.[15] It was his first. Embarked upon work for the M.A. that was considered important to the training of ministers (ordination was only three years away), Milton made his personal thank-offering for the infant Lord.

Meanwhile, on 13 December, Diodati had written from the country, describing his holiday visit with friends. It was a verse-letter apparently, with a vivid account of feasting and drinking during the Christmas season.[16] Charles asked for a song in return, a song expressive of their mutual affection. Milton must not deny him a poem, he declared. But Milton had something besides correspondence on his mind; he felt ready to attempt a long, sustained poetic flight and, perhaps to make amends for recent secular activities, perhaps to mark the significance of his recent birthday, he wanted to try a religious subject. Countless other poets had sung the Nativity of Jesus, and why should he, too, not essay it? Ever conscious of decorum, he realized that such a sublime theme demanded language both stately and simple, for the Christ-child, born in a rude stable, came to save the world. How much else was considered in advance and carefully planned, we cannot say; but Milton's virtuosity and mood of experimentation in this period of his life suggest that the *Nativity Ode* was no spontaneous outpouring of youthful feeling, but rather a special product of conscious and controlled artistry. The poem itself is rich in evidence for such a belief.

For example, consider the striking use of chiaroscuro. To Milton, Christ is the 'prince of light', and when He appeared on earth,

> Nature in awe to Him
> Had doffed her gaudy trim,
> With her great Master so to sympathize.

In other words, colour is not allowed to interfere with the repeated contrasts of light and darkness which the advent of the infant Lord in a sinful world suggests. There is a brief flash of colour in the next to the last stanza, as the heathen gods fade like the setting sun; but elsewhere one is conscious of the triumph of brightness over shadow. Although the *Ode* is full of quaint, unforgettable pictures, they are more reminiscent of an old woodcut or engraving than (as has been suggested)[17] a primitive Italian painting:

> At last surrounds their sight
> A globe of circular light
> That with long beams the shamefaced night arrayed;
> The helmèd cherubim
> And sworded seraphim
> Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,
> Harping in loud and solemn choir
> With unexpressive notes to heaven's new-born heir.

Even when something colourful is introduced, it is *felt* as black and white:

> Yea, Truth and Justice then
> Will down return to men
> Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
> Mercy will sit between,
> Throned in celestial sheen,
> With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
> And heaven as at some festival
> Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.

A rare colour word does not disturb the general effect:

> But He, her fears to cease,
> Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;
> She, crowned with olive *green*, came softly sliding
> Down through the turning sphere

His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing;
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

Some of the pictures are so naïve, so strikingly simple in contrast to the crowded, almost baroque panels which predominate in the poem, that one suspects a published 'source'. After the unoriginality of the seventh stanza, with its pun on 'sun' and 'Son', comes a memorable scene:

The shepherds on the lawn
Or ere the point of dawn
Sat simply chatting in a rustic row.

But Milton more probably saw it that way. His keen awareness of the need for decorum predetermined a poem of variety and contrast in imagery.

Another evidence of artistry is the construction, the architecture, of the *Ode*. The Hymn begins and ends with the Christ-child lying in the manger. Between these two scenes, three ideas or themes are introduced, each developed in a nearly equal number of stanzas. First is the 'peace on earth' motif, elaborated in a series of *six* pictures: 'meek-eyed Peace' descends, various instruments of strife are stilled, earth and ocean are quiet, the stars are transfixed, the sun hides his head, and the shepherds sit tranquilly in a 'rustic row'. The chatting of the shepherds is interrupted by angelic music, which is the second motif, elaborated in *seven* stanzas. Now, appropriately, the quiet pictorial element is subordinated, except for the sight of cherubim and seraphim 'harping in loud and solemn choir', and for an allegorical representation of 'the age of gold' returning. Milton develops the slight theme of celestial music with real ingenuity, comparing it to the song of the morning stars at the Creation, and then invoking the music of the spheres. Fancy, 'enwrapped' in such divine sounds, suggests the return of the Golden Age, and the second section reaches its climax of emotion and imagination. Three stanzas of interlude then bring us back to the infant Christ and reality:

But wisest fate says, 'No,
This must not yet be so;
The babe yet lies in smiling infancy
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss . . . .'

After the Crucifixion will come the Day of Judgement, when 'the wakeful trump of Doom must thunder through the deep'. Still, the Nativity promises the death of sin, and Satan's power is already curtailed.

This observation introduces the third, and final, motif of the poem—the departure of the pagan gods—which is elaborated in *eight* stanzas. Here the pictorial element returns, but with a difference; the chief artistic effect is the magic and mystery evoked by proper names.[18] Milton calls the roll (like an affectionate jailer) of dark and frightful deities—Peor, Baalim, Ashtaroth, Hammon, Thammuz, Moloch, Isis, Orus, Anubis, Osiris—and we feel much more than we see. It is a lurid, grimly terrible vision conjured up for us; and, if we submit to its suggestion, it prepares us not only for the 'dreaded infant' who 'can in His swaddling bands control the damnèd crew', but also for the most grotesque conceit of the poem:

So when the sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail . . .

In fact, we need the violence of these lines in order to feel the contrast in the final picture:

But see, the virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest.
Time is our tedious song should here have ending.

The child sleeps; once more it is peaceful; and now, instead of making celestial music, 'all about the courtly stable / Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable.' The closing stanza reminds us of the first and second motifs, and returns us to the familiar scene with which the hymn began. It is so beautifully and simply done, however, that we notice what has happened only after close analysis.

Milton introduces the Hymn proper with four stanzas that are winningly ingenuous. Trying to give his poem a sense of immediacy, he asks us to pretend that he is in Bethlehem on 'the happy morn', hurrying to offer his humble gift of verses before the Wise Men can arrive with their more exotic presents. The idea is far-fetched and naïve, but the poet's youthful vitality and seriousness give it charm. We are captured at once by the confidence, the sureness, of the language:

This is the month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of heaven's eternal King
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born
Our great redemption from above did bring . . . .

The stanzaic form is the same which he had previously used in the *Fair Infant* elegy, but he has now learned to make the concluding alexandrine support and emphasize his thought:

For so the holy sages once did sing,
That He our deadly forfeit should release,
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.

This clear mastery of the Spenserian line of extra length inspires our acceptance of the notion presented:

Say, Heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the infant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain
To welcome Him to this His new abode,
Now while the heaven by the sun's team untrod
Hath took no print of the approaching light,
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

The liturgical Hymn uses a stanzaic form different from that of the introduction, a form which sets it apart and gives metrical variety to the whole. Although Italian in inspiration, this seems to have been Milton's invention, another fruit of his mood of experimentation. It employs four different line-lengths, and it ends with an alexandrine. As a matter of fact, successful alexandrines in the Hymn appear even more effective than those in the introduction, for they are preceded by four-stress rather than five-stress lines, and their function is more conspicuous:

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet
As never was by mortal finger strook,
Divinely warbled voice
Answering the stringèd noise
As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
The air such pleasure loath to lose
*With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.*

Milton cannot, of course, in every stanza fit appropriate words to the special effect of the long line, but he does so often enough to excite our admiration. We do not expect the impossible:

For if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,
And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,
And hell itself will pass away
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Here is a well-nigh perfect union of words and metre and form, more than compensating for occasional disappointments.

Some disappointments there are. The very excellence of many stanzas makes others seem mediocre by comparison. Then, and only then, when the poet seems to let us down for a moment, we feel the artificiality of his scheme. Modern taste may then also agree with Warton that the more elaborate, more Elizabethan, conceits disfigure the poem. Instead of trying to understand why Milton deliberately used them in this and not in other verses of the same period, admirers of the poet are likely to explain them away as formerly fashionable, or youthful 'affectation', or forgivable lapses from otherwise impeccable taste. One critic was even more ingenious in his criticism, arguing that Milton at the time of writing the *Ode* had achieved a complex development of personality which was quickly lost, and hence his poem is distinctly un-Miltonic and unique.[19] This is no place to debate such matters, but a few observations may be permissible. In the first place, there are few conceits in the poem, but these few have been so often noticed by writers on Milton that one gets a misleading impression of their prominence. (Elaborate pictures without ingenuity or fancifulness of expression are not 'conceits'.) In the second place, most of the few conceits are concerned with sinful or inferior nature. Finally, most of the few conceits contrast with something simple or plain immediately following or preceding, and thus serve an artistic purpose.

With the *Nativity Ode* Milton entered the noble tradition of English religious verse. It was an impressive début. The *Ode* was the longest poem he had yet composed, longer than the imposing *In Quintum Novembris*. The author was proud of his accomplishment, and remained so; in 1645 and again in 1673 he placed the *Ode* first among his collected *Poems*. There can be no doubting the genuinely religious feeling which pervades the verses. Celebrating the mystery of the Incarnation, its theology is conventional and orthodox, including acceptance of the Trinity, although Christian and classical thought are blended throughout. Christ is Pan (from the point of view of the shepherds) and, as the babe who 'Can in His swaddling bands control the damnèd crew', is reminiscent of Hercules. The infant Lord is, of course, not a personality at all, and Milton treats Him largely as a symbol of goodness and truth. It is not the divine baby who is adored by the poet; it is the whole Christmas story, with its wonderful suggestions of peace on earth and singing angels, its wonderful promise of departing evil and beginning bliss. The adoration is real, and the language rises to the emotion. Here, as in the *Vacation Exercise* of the year before, is an occasional foretaste of the sonorous and stately line which posterity has called 'Miltonic'.[20]

To a generation of readers not brought up on Plutarch, Prudentius, and Mantuan, the noisy retreat of the pagan gods through a Miltonic panorama will not seem so integral a part of the Christmas story as the poet and many of his contemporaries considered it. Milton, of course, saved it for the last and devoted to it a stanza or two more than he did to the motifs we expect to meet, peace on earth and the herald angels. Clearly he loved this part of the imagining; the heathen demons and deities symbolized evil, but he had encountered them in well-loved books, and one senses something approaching affection if not sympathy for them in lines like 'And the yellow-skirted fays / Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze' or 'With flower-inwoven tresses torn / The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.'

Nevertheless, other lines suggest that the young author, consciously or subconsciously, regarded his *Nativity Ode* as a kind of poetical penance for unclerical performances like the prose sections of the Vacation Exercise. Undoubtedly it showed him, for the first time, how his own special talents might be used for the glory of God. That the Christmas poem delighted the boy's father we can feel certain. Yet if John Milton senior had by this time read the *Elegia Quinta*, with its forty erotic lines describing love between earth and sun, he may have noticed with a wry smile the very first stanza of the Hymn:

> Nature in awe to Him
> Had doffed her gaudy trim,
> With her great Master so to sympathize:
> It was no season then for her
> To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

In writing the *Nativity Ode* the younger Milton is conspicuously and unnecessarily concerned about guilty passion:

> Only with speeches fair
> She woos the gentle air
> To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,
> And on her naked shame,
> Pollute with sinful blame,
> The saintly veil of maiden white to throw,
> Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
> Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

This stanza is inartistic, not because of the conceit, which is perhaps appropriately grotesque, but because of the idea's utter irrelevance. There is no real transition to the stanza which follows, although Milton struggles to provide one. Perhaps a psychological disturbance has inhibited his art.

Later in the same Christmas season, Milton decided to compose a poetical letter to Charles Diodati, answering the one he had received before starting the *Ode*. This decision is especially significant, for it demonstrates that *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* far from exhausted Milton's poetical energy. His spirits were still high when he wrote the *Elegia Sexta*, turning easily from English to Latin, just as he had turned easily from Latin to English in the preceding spring. The beginning is flippant, gay, and bantering. To understand Milton's tone we must remember, first, that Diodati was the son of a physician and, second, that Diodati had written with enthusiasm about Yuletide feasts in the country. Milton teases him (as he does again in a prose letter of 1637) about his *health*: 'I who am not glutted with feasting wish you good health, which you probably need because of a stuffed stomach!' This jocular and informal sentence sets the tone for what immediately follows. He scolds his friend for enticing (*prolectat*) him to write poetry, and brushes aside with a witticism the latter's request for a song telling of his affection. Then he praises, with friendly enthusiasm, Diodati's description of his holiday: 'How well you describe the banquets and December hilarity, the festivals which honour the heaven-forsaking god! How well you report the joys of winter in the country and of French wine drunk by the jolly fireside!'

Diodati's description of his convivial visit to friends was almost certainly in verse. The letter is lost, and we have only Milton's account of it. It is clear, however, that Diodati apologized for verses sent, offering his holiday activities as an excuse. This 'apology', if we may judge from the tone of Milton's reply and from what we know of Diodati's character, was facetious. In any case, Milton proceeds to turn the 'excuse' offered—that feasting is not favourable to poetry—into the theme of a rhetorical debate. Each side is discussed learnedly and eloquently from a single point of view, in the manner of the academic 'prolusion'. Both young men had been thoroughly trained in this rhetorical technique at their respective universities, and Diodati would have quickly recognized his friend's intent. The *Elegia Sexta* is a semi-serious poem, poking gentle fun at common labours. It is a piece of relaxation after the strain of composing the *Nativity Ode*. In order to understand it, we must read it in its context of intimacy and collegian attitudes. Milton is, of course, genuinely and personally interested in the matters debated, but he is not writing to rebuke Diodati or to demonstrate that he is superior to his best friend.

First he defends the thesis, against Diodati, that song and feasting are congenial. For thirty-three lines, in 'a pretty vein of banter',[21] he cites various authorities and illustrations, as he and Diodati had been taught to do. The 'authorities' are deities in classical mythology: Bacchus, Apollo, and the Muses (lines 14–18). The illustrations are Latin and Greek poets: Ovid, Anacreon, Pindar, and Horace (lines 19–28). Ovid, he declares with humour, 'sent bad verses from the Corallian fields because there he had no banquets and there no vine was planted'. The final illustration, to which Milton devotes eight lines (29–36), is Diodati himself, whose verses disprove his own argument. This was a deft and gracious touch, which provided Milton with an opportunity to enlarge his theme: poetry belongs not only with *feasting*, but also with music, and dancing, and love (37–48), about all of which Diodati had presumably written. 'Believe me,' declares the author of the recent *Nativity Ode*, 'when the ivory keys are played and the festive crowd dances through the perfumed halls, you will feel Apollo steal silently into your breast like a sudden glow that penetrates your very bones; and through the eyes and hands of the fair musicians, Thalia will take possession of your whole heart.' A six-line summary then returns to the main theme: many different gods patronize the elegiac poet, for whom feasting and drinking are proper (49–54). There is nothing of condescension in any of this. Milton, who is actually writing an elegiac poem, argues the case with zest and humour.

It was Diodati, not Milton, who had originally stated the other position.

In re-presenting it, therefore, Milton needs only twenty-five lines (as contrasted with thirty-three). His method is the same, although his tone, obeying the laws of decorum, changes from cheerful to grave. It is the epic poet who must live sparingly (55-62). Confronted with the obvious difficulty of citing authorities for this among the pagan gods, Milton does not turn to the Bible (which would have made the argument *too* serious), but cites a few appropriate and learned details about Tiresias, Linus, Calchas, and Orpheus. As an illustration of an epic poet who is a spare eater and a water-drinker, he offers Homer—the Homer of the *Odyssey*. Nothing is said of Virgil or of the *Iliad*. He had listed Diodati among the elegiac poets, but he does not list himself among the epic poets, not even as an aspirant to epic honours. Instead, he gives Pythagoras as an example of living sparingly (59-60), and uses him as a springboard for enlarging his theme, as he had used Diodati in the first argument. Epic poetry belongs, not only with temperance, but also with purity, chastity, and blameless behaviour; indeed the epic poet is priestlike in his character (63-66). Just as there is not a precise parallelism in the complementary *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the various elements in the two arguments here are not in precisely the same sequence; but every element in the defence of feasting is present in the shorter defence of temperance. The latter also ends by pointing out that the bard is sacred to the gods (77-78).

This is a personal letter, however; it did not begin with the disputation, nor does it end with it. Diodati had asked Milton what he was doing, and the latter, with careful diffidence, tells him. Emphasizing the transition, he writes: 'But if you would know what I am doing (*At tu si quid agam scitabere*)', and adds, parenthetically, 'If indeed you think it consequential to know that I am doing *anything*!' Milton had not enjoyed a lively Christmas in the country, with pretty girls, and music, and feasting. There is just a trace of reproach in these two lines—or shall we call it envy? At any rate, there follows a brief (81-90), serious description of the *Nativity Ode* recently finished or just being finished. It is a far cry from this to the description of the wanderings of Ulysses; Milton here emphasizes—*as his ode does not*—the infant wails and humble roof of the Christ-child. The heathen gods who had dominated the academic defence of elegy and epic are suddenly shattered at their altars.

To speak of Milton's *Elegia Sexta* as 'a mental dedication of himself to the high calling of epic poetry', as 'a deep committal, fervently and wholeheartedly made', is quite unwarranted. To deduce further that 'at the time of his sixth elegy Milton not only dedicated himself to epic poetry but contemplated the history of Christ as the subject of his future epic' (with the *Nativity Ode* as a preliminary 'study') is even less warranted.[22] To argue that Milton must be speaking of himself, confiding his own plans, in the section on the ascetic life, yet merely bantering in the section on the festive life, is equivalent to arguing that Milton is really Il Penseroso and only exercising his wrist in the companion poem. Because he later wrote an epic, we have no excuse for reading his determination to do so into every piece of verse or prose that mentions epic material. Because he had an orderly mind and a penchant for autobiography, we must not find autobiography where none exists and mistake occasional reflection for statements of programme. One may concede both the possibility and the fascination of finding a late Milton early, but this familiar practice is deplorable when it ignores context, tone, and plain intention.

Rightly understood, the *Elegia Sexta* tells us much about the young Milton as a person and as an artist. He can argue eloquently for both 'gay elegy' and sublime poetry with good reason: he has just finished his first religious poem, yet is not above composing another light elegy to send his friend. In his thinking there is no harsh dichotomy between literary delights and 'dedicated' literature. He is able to adore both the Christmas story and a pretty face. He is not torn with indecision; he is aware of no artistic or spiritual dilemma. At this point, his mind is alert, receptive, experimental; and his poem to Diodati is expressive of physical well-being and humanistic health. He has made no severe and restrictive decisions for the simple reason that he sees none to be made. His capacity for delight is greater, one suspects, than that of many of his biographers, for he joys in both virtue and virtuosity, Ovid and the idea of chastity, learning and humility, gaiety and good behaviour. The *Elegia Sexta* is a poem by a young man with high ideals and great ambitions; but those ambitions have not yet become definite and delimiting, those ideals embrace both truth and beauty. We must remember, not only that Milton was preparing for the ministry, but also that his best friend—soon to be studying in the citadel of strict Calvinistic theology—defined *moderation* as 'Live, laugh, make the most of Youth and the hours as they pass'. Diodati and Milton were very different in temperament, but the *Elegia Sexta* was not a widening of the gap between them. It shows, rather, how they became—and remained—spiritual and intellectual comrades.

It was probably soon after Milton's twenty-first birthday that his father once more demonstrated his pride in the boy's development by a characteristic gesture: he commissioned another artist to do a portrait. For this solemn event John wore a black doublet and a white, falling ruff. He was doubtless self-conscious, but the painter managed to catch a pleasant, boyish expression, with alert brown eyes and just the faintest hint of a smile. At twenty-one Milton looked still seventeen. He no longer cut his hair short in Puritan fashion, but let it fall loosely to his collar, covering his ears, like a Cavalier. It was now dark brown. With his high colour and fair complexion, he was a strikingly handsome youth—a personable and intelligent-looking Bachelor of Arts.[23]

Milton's whereabouts during most of the year 1630 are a mystery. He had more leisure than he had anticipated, even with the new privileges of his degree, for 1630 was another plague year, and this time Cambridge was hard hit. In April the University abandoned all activities; students and Fellows fled to safer regions; and the colleges did not begin to reassemble until November or December.[24] Milton could not use the disruption of academic life as an excuse for some excursion with Diodati, because early in the same year his friend left England for study on the Continent; on 6/16 April Charles matriculated as a student in theology at the Academy of Geneva, where his uncle, Giovanni Diodati, was a famous teacher; and he was still there, we know, on 5/15 September 1631.[25] If Milton went to Cambridge at the beginning of the Lent term of 1630, he probably returned home in March and remained there until the threat of plague—which for once had struck Cambridge before it menaced London—drove him and his family to some haven in the country. Perhaps, in April, he accompanied his father on a journey to Exeter.[26] But this is conjecture; all that we certainly know about Milton's activities during 1630 is that he wrote several poems. One is inclined, however, to assign to this unusual year the composition of a good many poems for which we have no dates.

Easter came on 28 March, and it was almost certainly during the Easter season of 1630 that Milton composed his verses on *The Passion*.[27] He had observed that numerous other poets had written a series of poems on different holy days in the church calendar, and it occurred to him that, over a period of time, he might do the same. He began, therefore, with a self-conscious reference to his own recent accomplishment:

> Erewhile of music and ethereal mirth
> Wherewith the stage of air and earth did ring,
> And joyous news of heavenly infant's birth,
> My muse with angels did divide to sing.

Then, a transition to his new and tragic theme:

> But headlong joy is ever on the wing,
> In wintry solstice like the shortened light
> Soon swallowed up in dark and long outliving night.

This was the same stanzaic form he had tried in the *Fair Infant* elegy and had mastered in the introduction to the *Nativity Ode*. He used it confidently now, with skilful manipulation of the long final line.

Milton wrote eight stanzas of *The Passion* before he realized what was wrong. He had produced some effective alexandrines; he liked the sound of many lines. Still, when he looked back, he may have noticed that he had repeated the rime sounds in the concluding couplets of his first, second, and fifth stanzas. (Probably he had paused too long between them, wondering how to continue. Perhaps he had suffered some interruptions.) But something was wrong apart from these technical blemishes; the verses were getting nowhere. They seemed laboured, and artificial, and empty of genuine feeling. His delight in the implications and details of the Christmas story had been real, but his professed grief at thoughts of the Crucifixion turned out to be literary. *He was writing a poem about himself writing a poem*; in every stanza except the third he had described himself in the process of composition. It was like making sorrowful faces at a mirror.

He decided to leave *The Passion* unfinished. The subject, he later explained laconically, was 'above the years he had when he wrote it'. He was twenty-one. He did not destroy his failure; he preserved it, and in 1645 printed it with his other poems, adding the note about his personal inadequacy to the theme. Clearly his abortive attempt had some special significance for him. It should also have some special significance for his readers.

The emotion, the poetical energy that moved steadily through the thirty-one stanzas of the *Nativity Ode*, is strangely missing from his second religious poem. There the stanzas stand alone, coldly competent but not impelling. They promise nothing; they lack momentum. Milton had language and learning and skill enough; he had piety enough; but he lacked the experience of life to make a poem upon so tragic and triumphant a theme.

If he made this discovery in 1630, as seems highly probable from all the circumstances, it must have been one of the most memorable and influential events in his entire artistic development—one never to be forgotten. The failure of *The Passion* may have taught him more than could a dozen successes. He may have learned from it something basic and essential about great poetry, something he never ceased to believe, something that determined the whole ordering of his life. He already knew the value of study; he already knew the importance of craftsmanship; but now he may have realized, as well, the necessity for personal preparation, for emotional maturity, for spiritual experience. He expressed it eloquently twelve years later, when reviewing the moral and intellectual phases of his youth: 'And long it was not after when I was *confirmed* in this opinion: that he who would *not be frustrate* of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not *presuming* to sing high praises of *heroic men* or famous cities unless he have in himself the *experience* and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.'[28] When he wrote these lines of reminiscence (to which I have added a few italics), perhaps he thought of the 'most perfect Hero, tried in heaviest plight', whose suffering he had once tried, and failed, to describe.

This is as good a time as any to consider the foregoing quotation in its context. Ten years after the poet graduated from Cambridge, he was attacked in print by an anonymous opponent who, knowing nothing of Milton personally, made wild and defamatory inferences from the language of Milton's anonymously published *Animadversions* (1641). The slander that most infuriated was the charge of unchastity. His reply, *An Apology*

(1642), contained an indignant vindication in the shape of spiritual and mental autobiography, the most interesting part of which is an account of youthful reading, an account which throws light upon his artistic development if we keep in mind what prompted it. The account is not only incomplete but also sublimated, for Milton was concerned solely with his early attitudes towards chastity; nothing else mattered for the moment.

He begins: 'But because . . . he would seem privily to point me out to his readers as one whose custom of life were not honest but licentious, I shall entreat to be borne with though I digress and, in a way not often trod, acquaint ye with the sum of my thoughts *in this matter* through the course of my years and studies . . .' He speaks first of his formal education: 'I had my time, readers, as others have who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places where the opinion was it might be soonest attained, and, as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended: whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them.' The ancient orators and historians were not the only subjects studied at school and university: 'Others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous [i.e., metrical] writing, which in imitation I found most easy and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their *matter* (which, what it is, there be few who know not) I was so allured to read that no recreation came to me better welcome. For that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye.' Milton refers, it would seem, not only to his schooldays but also to 1626–9, the years of his first poetic outburst, when he wrote chiefly Latin verse. It was not religious poetry he had imitated with such enthusiasm, and the subject-matter of his models was often far from chaste; but he candidly asks his readers to recall their own educations.[29]

Looking back upon his youthful experience, he finds that it was not devoid of moral instruction:

> Having observed them [the Latin poets] to account it the chief glory of their wit in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what imboldened them to this task might with such diligence as they used imbolden me, and that what judgement, wit, or elegance was my share would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent!) the object of not unlike praises. . . . Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred.

We expect such remarks as these in what is essentially an answer to a charge of unchastity. But note what follows. Milton risks his reader's good opinion by explaining that while he learned to condemn an immoral *artist*, he continued to admire the art: 'I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or *unchaste* of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought with me: from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored . . .' Having learned to make this distinction, Milton next (in order of time, it would appear, and probably he has reached the year 1629 or 1630) discovered the poetry of Dante and Petrarch: '. . . but the men I deplored, and above them all preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression.'

That is all; he says nothing more of this youthful enthusiasm, nothing of his own first attempts to write Petrarchan sonnets. Instead, he continues with the passage which we have already noted: 'And *long it was not after* when I was confirmed in this opinion: that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.' Although this sounds something like the formula given in the *Elegia Sexta* for the discipline of an epic poet, Milton is here discussing, not epic poetry, but poetry in general. He has just praised the characters of Dante and Petrarch, who presumably illustrate his statement. Notice, moreover, the expressions 'I was confirmed' and 'frustrate of his hope to write well'. Something happened to 'confirm' Milton in this moral–aesthetic conclusion; and he speaks, not of one who would write well, but of one 'who would not be frustrate of his hope'. The only early frustration of Milton's poetical hopes that we know anything about is the abortive *Passion.* He need not have been speaking with an experience of his own in mind; but the fact of such an experience, together with the wording of the passage and the coincidence of chronology, makes it highly probable that he is thinking of his only acknowledged youthful failure.[30]

We must not overlook one important difficulty in interpreting this passage. Read in its context, its purpose and theme are not literary, but moral; Milton is exclusively discussing the moral equipment of a good poet. If the conclusion expressed above is valid, there should be somewhere a corresponding statement about *intellectual* equipment. Two years later, in his letter *Of Education* (1644), he makes such a statement: speaking of the 'preposterous exaction' of verses from 'the empty wits of children' in school, he calls the making of true poetry 'acts of ripest judgement and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing'.

Perhaps this is too incidental; if so, we may turn to *The Reason of Church Government* (1641), written only a few months before the passages we have been studying. Milton there speaks of the poet's need for divine assistance, and continues: 'To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs . . .'[31] Just when he became 'confirmed' in this judgement, he does not say; but it seems only reasonable to link it with his subsequent statement about the poet's having 'in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy'. And, as we have seen, the second, corresponding conviction can be dated.

While we are on the subject, let us consider further the entire passage in the *Apology*. Following his remarks about the moral nature of the true poet, Milton continues his story of developing literary interests: 'Next (for hear me out now, readers, that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered) I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all Christendom.' Here we may pause, for the writer goes on to explain how he learned from these tales of chivalry 'what a noble virtue chastity sure must be', thus returning to his defence of himself. The next and last influence to be mentioned is not from 'the laureate fraternity of poets', but rather 'divine' Plato, understood during 'riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading'.[32]

That is the passage. It seems to promise much to the student of chronology and of Milton's artistic development, but at best it is elusive and ambiguous. Its essential purpose is not literary but moral. It does not pretend to be complete. Milton mentions his own poetry only in connexion with the Latin elegiac poets, and says nothing directly or indirectly about imitating Petrarch or anyone else. He mentions technique only in connexion with the Latin poets. His main interest in the whole account (determined, of course, by the nature of the charge against which he is defending himself) is in the subject-matter of his youthful reading. *He says absolutely nothing about the subject-matter of his own youthful writing.*[33]

With these facts understood, we may observe that the autobiographical account supports a few independent conclusions about Milton's poetical progress. Indeed, there is every reason to suppose that the reading of a literary artist will be partly reflected in his work. Milton's first original poetry is an 'easy' imitation of the metre and the manner of Ovid and other 'smooth elegiac poets', although the subject-matter derives from a variety of other traditions. He continues for a time, not only to 'applaud', but also to imitate the 'art' of these pagans, even after discovering the delights of Petrarchan verse. The fifth, sixth, and seventh elegies are instances of this. But the Italian sonnet does, in fact, seem to emerge as a conspicuous influence upon his poetry in 1629–30, when he first writes—

in Latin and Italian and English—upon the subject of love. As for the influence of Spenser (if Spenser be meant by the reference to 'lofty fables' in 'solemn cantos'), the Spenserian technique (perhaps learned through the Fletchers) is perceptible as early as the *Fair Infant* elegy, and it reappears in the *Nativity Ode* and *Passion*. On the other hand, the influence of Spenser's subject-matter and ideas—which Milton must have had in mind in this moral discussion—does not become conspicuous in his poetry until the composition of *Comus*. Meanwhile, another important influence emerges about which he says nothing in the *Apology*—the influence of Ben Jonson and the Cavaliers. But this is to anticipate.

The failure of *The Passion* resulted in a return to former and less difficult kinds of verse, including the Latin elegy. Milton was genuinely and thoroughly religious in his youth, but most of his poetry was not; he was 'destined of a child' for the ministry, but his muse was essentially earthbound. To write sacred verse demanded more than simple belief; insight and passionate conviction were also necessary, and an inward urgency. Milton did not doubt the reality of inspiration. The *Nativity Ode* had been a fortunate subject, to which his reading and Christmas mood and twenty-first birthday had given special meaning, and when he invoked the help of the 'heavenly muse' in writing it, he was not being simply rhetorical; the gift he wanted to bring the Christ-child had to be first a gift to the hopeful poet. Other such occasions might occur later, but he would wait for them. Divine inspiration did not come at the crook of an ink-stained finger, but came only to those who were spiritually ready and worthy.

Alexander Gill the younger was perhaps an example. He sent Milton a long Latin poem celebrating Henry of Nassau's recent capture of Hertogenbosch (Bois le Duc), and in an accompanying letter invited the criticism of the former Pauline. He explained that, in writing this poem, he had broken a resolution. His bitter experiences with the Star Chamber, it would seem, had caused him to forswear the composition of any further political verse; but he had felt compelled to write *In Sylvam-Ducis*. Milton replied from London on 20 May, saying in part:

> I have received your letter and, which gave me intense pleasure, your truly magnificent verses, inspired throughout by genuine poetic majesty and a Virgilian spirit. I knew very well that anyone gifted with your genius would find it impossible to renounce poetry and banish from his heart that heaven-sent inspiration, that sacred and celestial fire; for one may say of you as Claudius said of himself, 'Phoebus alone is my life's breath'. Hence, if you have broken your resolutions I have only praise for your 'inconstancy' (as you call it) and your 'dishonourable conduct', if there be any. . . . Now that we hear you celebrate our allies' success in such a triumphant and sonorous strain, what a laureate we shall expect to have in you if finally our own fortunes prosper and merit your congratulatory muse![34]

Such fulsome praise was neither generosity nor magnanimity in Milton.

He admired Gill's talent, and did not question the genuineness of his inspiration.

As for himself, in May of 1630 he was evidently able to read and write to his heart's content. It was springtime, and he took long walks in the parks and fields outside the city walls. If we may judge from his later statement about coming to prefer 'the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura', much reading of love poetry was leaving its mark on the young man's imagination. At this period—or it would be strange indeed! —his mind was cluttered with the paraphernalia of Cupid, and he was as ready as Romeo to kiss by the book. Probably no susceptible boy of twenty-one ever waited for his Juliet with a better-conned vocabulary.

Early in May, it would seem, the inevitable happened; he fell in love at first sight. We do not know the name of the girl, but we know, of course, that she was beautiful. We know also who was present at the exciting event: Ovid was there, and Petrarch; Horace was there, and Buchanan, and Dante, and a host of bright and smiling spirits who had written eloquently of love. These were the witnesses, and if we are desirous of details, we may question them. For they hurried home with the poet, where pen and paper were waiting, and they hovered over him, happy to be of assistance, as he began to compose his *Elegia Septima*.[35]

I do not doubt, though some have doubted, that Milton's seventh elegy records an actual experience. By his own statement he went for one of his customary walks, exchanging glances boldly with the pretty girls whom he passed. Then, out of his day-dreams into reality emerged a creature more beautiful than all the rest. The poet was on fire, recognizing at once the familiar and fascinating symptoms. Time stood still, and Milton's heart turned over like the page of a book. In another moment the adventure ended. The girl strolled on, blissfully unaware of her contribution to Anglo-Latin verse. We do not even know whether she was dark or fair.

The *Elegia Septima* is the last of Milton's long poems in elegiac verse. In language and emotion it is conventionally extravagant. Its sentimental machinery creaks, rhythmically. The poet had insulted Cupid, who, naturally, determined to be revenged. Cupid appeared to him in the early morning and threatened him. The poet laughed scornfully. Then the poet walked abroad, and Cupid proved his power. Just like that. Nevertheless, we must not dismiss all this as mere literary exercise. Let us try to see it from Milton's point of view. The experience was real, but fragmentary and inconclusive. There was a romantic thrill, a sense of mystery, in feeling love for an Unknown Beauty; but there was also anticlimax. To have given direct, personal expression to the incident would have been to make it ridiculous. To clothe it in the trappings of poetic tradition was to give it significance. We are spectators at the immemorial ritual of Love-at-First-Sight, and we embarrass ourselves, not the performer, if we laugh at the fusty costumes and faded scenery. Stripped to cold and shivering prose, the young lover looks absurd, of course; and the whole happening makes an amusing few pages in his biography. But we shall understand Milton better, in his *Elegia Septima*, if we leave him in his ceremonial robes. A ritual becomes less, not more, meaningful when it is seen in undress.

Despite the artificial language of the poem, it contains fewer allusions in the form of geographical and proper names than any of the other elegies. Its conventionality is largely of sentiment. Milton fell in love, not only at first sight, but also with sweet misery, with unique passion, and with all the other prescribed feelings. He did the thing properly. These facts imply an attitude both eager and immature. Intellectually he had made great strides at age twenty-one. Emotionally he was still callow and impressionable. For a time yet, love was bound to be somewhat literary. Still, he had suffered his first experience, and the *Elegia Septima* makes it plain that he will not flee from a second. Eve has had her first chat with the Serpent.

The second experience probably came soon afterwards. We know very little about it, but we do know the girl's Christian name and something of the circumstances. Let us suppose, then, that it was during the summer of 1630 that John met Emilia. She was beautiful and gracious and proud, of course. She had dark hair and eyes, and a lovely singing voice. She spoke several languages. Milton fell in love with her—and she did not walk away, leaving him alone with Ovid. Instead, she showed an interest in his poetry, was pleased to learn that he could read and write Italian (what a talented young man!), and even encouraged him to address her in a sonnet. There were other young people about, who teased Milton when he tried to compose verses in Italian to please her. It all happened in the country, probably, while Milton was visiting gay young friends. In the poet's mood are mountains and sunshine and warm weather.

The Italian sonnets and accompanying *canzone* tell a story which can be touched only with the fingertips of understanding.[36] The student of Milton would give much to be able to verify certain guesses, but we have no light beyond the poems themselves. Even the riddled name of Emilia (in the opening lines of the first sonnet) was not discovered until 1921, when John S. Smart found the key; and the lady awaits further identification. There is nothing, however, to prevent our spinning a web of narrative from suggestions in the verses; the attempt, although it will establish nothing, may at least make us more attentive to the poet's words. This, then, is what one reader finds in that busiest of all places frequented by critics—between the lines.

When Milton met Emilia (along with some other girls and some pleasant young men) her beauty, her manner, and her exotic air attracted him at once. She was of Italian origin and spoke the language of her ancestors delightfully. The other men in the group understood not a word of the foreign tongue, but Milton, fascinated, begged her to talk to him in

Italian. Flattered by his attention, she complied, saying for his private ear, '*Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore*' ('This is a language of which Love boasts'). The intimacy of this exchange thrilled the young poet; he now realized that he had fallen in love with this exciting and talented creature who, in addition to her other graces, possessed a singing voice of rare charm. He decided to write a sonnet to her, in Italian, confessing his affection. It was not easy. The language was difficult enough, but far worse was the problem of how to speak of the feeling in his heart. At length it was finished, and the result was a timid compromise with his original intention. He was open in praise of the lady's beauty and virtue and glorious voice, but of love he wrote by indirection. Only a man devoid of worth could escape loving her; when she sang, only 'grace from above' could save a man's heart. Nowhere did he speak explicitly of his own ardour. She would understand—she whose name was riddled in the opening lines of the poem.

He sent it to her, shyly, we imagine. When they next met, she did not refer to the sonnet, but her manner toward him told that it had not been unwelcome. He composed another, a self-conscious confession that he was writing in Italian because 'Love willed it'. This ambiguous reference to her earlier remark she could interpret as she wished. Surely by now she must understand that he wrote because he loved her! Everyone else realized it. They even knew that he was composing sonnets for her in Italian. When Emilia was not present, they teased Milton unmercifully. Why put it on paper? And why go to all the trouble of Italian? Speak to her. Tell her—in English. Milton, who yet lacked the courage to say anything face to face, recorded in a *canzone* what the others were saying. This was equivalent to telling her. To Charles Diodati, in still another Italian sonnet, he spoke openly of his love, reminding his friend of his long immunity and former indifference.

Emilia broke the silence, thanking him for the poems. Their conversation was tender. Encouraged, he penned a fourth sonnet, pouring out his heart in the words that glib memory supplied. This sonnet (which modern criticism dismisses as wooden and conventional) probably gratified Emilia more than did any of the others, for it employed the expressions which she expected in a love-poem. Her eyes were his sun and powerfully affected him. He felt a pain in his heart, and his sighs congealed into tears at night when he was separated from her. This was 'Love's language'—as Milton self-consciously declared in the sonnet itself. It must have proved effective, for the fifth and last sonnet is the most confident, the most direct and personal of the series. He cannot escape loving her, and he offers his heart in humble devotion. With dignity and pride he assures her that it is faithful, proof against any trial except love.

None of the sonnets imply a 'cruel she'. None of them hint of one-sided love. If the affair ended unhappily at last, there is no poem extant to prove the fact. Milton's tone, in the verses we have been considering, is never abject, never uncertain; on the contrary, it grows more assured with each new confession. At twenty-one, if I have dated this experience correctly, he knew the tingling joy, the indescribable satisfaction of loving and being loved. It is an important (if cryptic) chapter in his emotional history, preparing us for a much later chapter which will see him married to a woman who could not read these sonnets when he published them in 1645. Many paragraphs in the story are missing, among them both the beginning and the conclusion, but we must not ignore or undervalue the fragment that remains. With the Italian sonnets, Milton becomes the Lover. It is not surprising that we soon find him the Cavalier.

It was probably in 1630, although possibly as early as 1629, that he was invited to contribute some verses for an entertainment honouring Alice, Countess Dowager of Derby, a venerable and distinguished lady who was both mother-in-law and stepmother of John Egerton, Earl of Bridgewater.[37] She was also the aunt of James Stanley, Lord Strange, who had been a client of Milton's father, and she was godmother to another such client, Sir Francis Leigh. Some members of her numerous family, knowing her delight in music and in masquing, planned a little party with pastoral trappings to compliment her.[38] We do not know precisely what the occasion was, nor which members of the family participated, nor how Milton happened to be invited to help.[39] The poet tells us only that his *Arcades* was 'part of an entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby, at Harefield, by some noble persons of her family'.

The notion may be shocking to some of Milton's admirers, but it is not inconceivable that, at twenty-one, he was wondering about the advisability of finding a great patron. Many authors and many theological students in that century sought eagerly for patronage; and certainly the idea was not repugnant to Milton eight years later when he expressed his admiration for Manso. If he had such ambitions in 1630, he had not far to look for a person who could have encouraged them with practical advice. We do not know exactly when Milton first became acquainted with Henry Lawes, the famous musician, but the deep and persistent interest of Milton's father in things musical argues for an early meeting.[40] Lawes, who was thirteen years older than the Cambridge student, had been dependent upon patronage from his youth; and, from January of 1630, when he was sworn a member of the King's Private Music, he could count himself a success professionally. He was on terms of familiarity with courtiers; he could even sing a new poet's lyrics to Charles I at Whitehall. For fifteen or more years he had known the struggles of an artist in the fashionable world, and his story must have held some interest for young Milton. Lawes was throughout his life a friend of poets. More to the point of our present question, he had been associated with the Egerton family for some years as tutor in music for the children; and an entertainment involving music inevitably required his counsel and assistance. Perhaps he proposed Milton as a suitable person to write the verses for the affair; perhaps the suggestion came from some member of the family who already knew Milton's talents. Whatever happened, for *Arcades* the poet wrote a lengthy recitation and three songs carefully adapted to the nature of the entertainment. That these songs were 'set in music by Mr. Henry Lawes' we are told by the title page of the collection in which they were eventually published.

With the composition of *Arcades*, its author entered the fashionable world, making personal contact with one of the great noble families of seventeenth-century society. It is almost inconceivable that he did not travel to Harefield to be graciously thanked for his verses by the ageing Countess Dowager, who in her youth had been celebrated by Edmund Spenser and other poets. Possibly Milton was present at the entertainment itself. In any case, with the composition of *Arcades* he walked confidently into the world of acted drama and private theatricals so popular with the Court of Charles I. Recording the fact, we may remind ourselves that Milton had never objected to drama; he objected, as we have observed, to degrading *kinds* of drama, particularly plays in which men of God made public fools of themselves. A little pageant honouring a great lady was harmless enough, and the opportunity to win praise from the influential Egertons must have been tempting.

*Arcades* is a notable instance of a poet subordinating his own personality to a form and to the spirit of an event. Like the earlier *Vacation Exercise*, this poetical fragment was but part of an entertainment, and it was written for a specific social occasion. Like the Italian sonnets, but unlike the remainder of Milton's earlier poetry, it was written in praise of a *living* person, a woman. Milton seems to have understood perfectly what he was expected to do. The pastoral was arranged for an outdoor, evening performance, and his lines show some awareness of the actual setting—the long avenue of elms leading to the house (line 89), the smooth lawn (84), the hill in the background (55). It is not difficult to reproduce the scene in imagination. Amidst the trees on the 'enamelled green' of the Harefield estate, the Countess and some of her guests were seated, waiting in a blaze of torchlight, the grand old lady peering into the darkness beyond from a shining and canopied throne. When all was ready, some members of her family, dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses, appeared in the distance and moved toward her, singing:

> Look, nymphs, and shepherds, look!
> What sudden blaze of majesty
> Is that which we from hence descry,
> Too divine to be mistook?
> This . . . this . . . is . . . she[41]
> To whom our vows and wishes bend;
> Here our solemn search hath end.

Thus the entertainment began. The opening song, saluting the Countess, was in four stanzas. Roughly speaking, it employs a metre we shall meet again in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, but the rhythms are handled with even greater freedom than in these twin poems, there being almost twice as many seven-syllable as eight-syllable lines, and two instances of six-syllable lines. The rime patterns are equally varied, with only one repetition in four stanzas. Milton is beginning what will turn out to be a long struggle toward greater and yet greater freedom of metre and line-length and rime-scheme. Here it seems possible that he wrote with a definite tune in mind, perhaps something composed by Lawes, and ready; if music was especially written for *Arcades*, it has not survived.

After the first song, another performer (probably Lawes, less probably Milton himself) appeared out of the darkness and addressed the noble singers in fifty-eight lines of heroic couplets. His tone was properly deferential and complimentary:

> Stay, gentle swains, for though in this disguise,
> I see bright honour sparkle through your eyes . . .
> And ye, the breathing roses of the wood,
> Fair silver-buskined nymphs as great and good,
> I know this quest of yours and free intent
> Was all in honour and devotion meant
> To the great mistress of yon princely shrine,
> Whom with low reverence I adore as mine,
> And with all helpful service will comply
> To further this night's glad solemnity . . .

He then identified himself as 'the Genius of the Wood' in which the entertainment was being held, and described his various duties 'by lot from Jove'. (We had thought such a Genius banished forever in line 186 of the pious *Nativity Ode*! But we shall meet him again.) As an immortal he could, of course, hear the music of the spheres—a fact which enabled the poet to introduce one of his favourite themes:

> in deep of night when drowsiness
> Hath locked up mortal sense, then listen I
> To the celestial sirens' harmony
> That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,
> And sing to those that hold the vital shears
> And turn the adamantine spindle round
> On which the fate of gods and men is wound.
> Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie
> To lull the daughters of Necessity
> And keep unsteady Nature to her law,
> And the low world in measured motion draw
> After the heavenly tune . . .

Milton here wrote of the music of the spheres in order to fashion an elegant tribute to the Countess Dowager of Derby:

> such music worthiest were to blaze
> The peerless height of her immortal praise
> Whose lustre leads us, and for her most fit,
> If my inferior hand or voice could hit
> Inimitable sounds; yet as we go,
> Whate'er the skill of lesser gods can show
> I will essay, her worth to celebrate,
> And so attend ye toward her glittering state . . .

The Genius of the Wood—the 'lesser god'—then turned singer, accompanying himself upon some stringed instrument, and led the young people nearer the throne.

Probably they moved forward with measured steps; the second song is made up of varied and dancing rhythms. It is the lightest and gayest of the three:

> O'er the smooth enamelled green
> Where no print of step hath been
>   Follow me as I sing
>   And touch the warbled string.
>   Under the shady roof
>   Of branching elm star-proof
>     Follow me;
> I will bring you where she sits
> Clad in splendour as befits
>     Her deity.
>   Such a rural queen
>   All Arcadia hath not seen.

In a final song, to a different tune, the Genius then bade them 'dance no more':

> Trip no more in twilight ranks;
> Though Erymanth your loss deplore,
> A better soil shall give ye thanks.
> From the stony Mænalus
> Bring your flocks and live with us;
> Here ye shall have greater grace
> To serve the Lady of this place . . .

And with this Milton's contributions to the entertainment evidently ended. The Arcadians were presented in some fashion to the Countess, and further ceremonies followed.

Whatever its more specific debts, *Arcades* is in the manner of Ben Jonson and his 'tribe', and conforms gracefully to contemporary taste. Indeed, in his clarity and conscious simplicity, in the polish of his heroic couplets, Milton proclaims himself now one of the 'Sons of Ben'. He praises his subject in a hyperbolic, courtly way, exaggerating her virtues by extravagant comparisons, stressing her high station, finally calling her a queen. Perhaps most interesting of all to the student of Milton's artistic development is the allusion to the music of the spheres. In the *Nativity Ode* he had used this idea with deeply religious feeling, making it a symbol of moral perfection, as he was to do again in *At a Solemn Music*. Now, however, in *Arcades*, it is neatly and glibly interpreted as 'most fit' and 'worthiest' to celebrate the Countess. Milton has learned to exaggerate smartly, like a Cavalier poet.

Almost all Milton's verse uses the shorthand of mythological allusion, but in *Arcades* these allusions are limited in use. In the last stanza of the opening song they are sparingly used, as they were profusely used in the *Fair Infant* elegy, in order to elevate and ennoble the poem's subject through analogy. In the very opening of the Genius' speech, and again in the final song, they are sparingly used to remind us of the idealized Arcadia of Ovid, Theocritus, Sidney, and many other poets. As in his choice of words generally, Milton has learned the virtues of economy.

*Arcades* is a much less personal utterance than the sonnets or the several Latin elegies written to good friends; indeed, in prosaic terms, it has little of anything to say; but in poetic terms it reveals an artist with the tact and taste to embellish a courtly occasion appropriately. Like the four stanzas that open the *Nativity Ode*, the opening stanza of *Arcades* invites us to suspend disbelief, and accept a pretty fiction as the excuse for the poetry. The nymphs and shepherds have come from far-off Arcady to England in search of a new patroness or presiding deity, whom they find in the ageing Countess. That's all there seems to be to it. But it can also mean—and Milton's poem, to the very degree that it succeeds, makes it mean—that they seek *and find* in England a new homeland for pastoral poetry. Milton is impersonal, but he is also an ambitious craftsman, and he knew what he was doing. Soon would come *Comus* and *Lycidas*.

During the summer and autumn of 1630, a few things happened which Milton eventually heard about with interest, wherever he then was. He had probably known that Andrew Sandelands was vacating his fellowship at Christ's, but he must have shared the surprise of the College community over the appointment of a successor. It was one of those instances of royal interference with the autonomy of colleges and universities which had occurred before and would now occur more frequently, with Laud to counsel the King. On 10 June Charles I sent a letter to the Master and Fellows of Christ's ordering the appointment of Edward King 'notwithstanding any statute, ordinance, or constitution to the contrary'. The new Fellow was a boy of about eighteen who had just earned his B.A. He was one year Milton's academic junior, three years his junior in age. Milton probably learned about the appointment in November, when the colleges reassembled.[42] Meanwhile, in August of 1630, his sister Anne Phillips gave birth (perhaps in Shrewsbury) to another son, christened

Edward after his father. The boy was destined to become his uncle's pupil, amanuensis, and biographer.[43] One other event of this period was welcome news: on 30 November Alexander Gill, after two years of punishment, received a full royal pardon for his offences.[44]

The appointment of young Edward King to a fellowship was obviously a matter of politics; his father, Sir John, and his elder brother, Sir Robert King, were both important administrators in Ireland; his godfather, Edward King, was Bishop of Elphin. Nevertheless, the real ability and lovable personality of the boy soon overcame any resentment which persons may have felt over the arbitrariness of his appointment. Milton could hardly have felt any personal resentment, for there is no reason to believe that he considered himself a possible candidate for the position.[45] It was most unusual for a new Bachelor of Arts to be appointed Fellow.[46] In any case, Milton was a Londoner, as was Michael Honywood, and the statutes of the College, while naming the nine counties to be preferred in the election of Fellows (London and Middlesex not among them), stated that 'there shall not be more than one from any one of the aforementioned counties, [or] . . . from any other county of the whole of England'.[47] It is therefore sheer romancing to assume, as many have assumed, that Milton hoped to receive the appointment which Edward King (or anyone else)[48] received.

By 28 November enough students had returned to Christ's College to resume the practice of dining in hall, and Milton may have been among them. Whenever he returned, his discovery of the ravages of the plague in Cambridge must have been sobering. While he had been away, the academic community had known acute distress, and tragedy, and heroism. During the Christmas season of 1630, we may well believe, Milton's mood was serious. December brought his twenty-second birthday (a reminder that he could soon take Holy Orders) and the first anniversary of the *Nativity Ode* (with its reminder of a companion poem that was a failure). It was an auspicious time for another poetical attempt, and his new poem was probably the brief and solemn meditation *On Time*.[49]

It was his third effort at religious verse, and with it he abandoned the formal and confining stanzas of *The Passion* and the *Ode*, adopting instead a loose verse-paragraph with irregular rimes, probably suggested by the Italian madrigal, a less exacting form than the *canzone*. Having previously used the Spenserian alexandrine for special effects, he now learned that a suddenly shortened line could also reinforce meaning while giving pleasant variety. The first movement of the poem, using alternate and enclosed (*cddc*) rime, tried the new technical device:

> Fly, envious Time, till thou run out thy race!
> Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours
> Whose speed is but the heavy plummet's pace,
> And glut thyself with what thy womb devours,

Which is no more than what is false and vain,
And merely mortal dross;
So little is our loss,
So little is thy gain.

Milton anticipated the happy day—which many of his contemporaries felt would soon arrive—when time will have run out its course, when sin and corruptibility and vanity will have disappeared, and when Christians can enjoy with their Creator unending bliss. It was a mood which he had touched upon metaphorically in the *Nativity Ode* of the previous year:

Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,
And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould . . .
Yea, Truth and Justice then
Will down return to men . . .

In the second movement of this new poem he elaborated the idea in a long, breathless sentence climaxing in an alexandrine:

For whenas each thing bad thou hast entombed
And, last of all, thy greedy self consumed,
Then long eternity shall greet our bliss
With an individual kiss,
And joy shall overtake us as a flood,
When everything that is sincerely good
And perfectly divine
With truth and peace and love shall ever shine
About the supreme throne
Of Him to whose happy-making sight alone,
When once our heavenly-guided soul shall climb,
Then all this earthy grossness quit,
Attired with stars, we shall for ever sit
Triumphing over death and chance and thee, O Time!

The concept of a returning Age of Gold is exchanged for the Christian hope of everlasting life in Heaven.

*On Time* marks a distinct step forward in Milton's development as a craftsman. It is an experiment in verse-paragraph construction, happily conceived, and on the whole successful. The transition at the beginning from enclosed to couplet rime emphasizes the opening of the second movement. The slightly delayed rime at the very end emphasizes the alexandrine, as does the syntax at this point. The shortened lines at the close of the first movement are conspicuously effective. Those in the second movement are perhaps less so, although they contribute in some obscure way to the rhythms of mounting ecstasy produced by the run-on lines.

In *On Time* there is none of the zest for life, the sensuous joy, the humanistic air of well-being which had animated the earlier poems in Latin and English, even those congratulating the dead upon achieving eternal happiness. Here is contempt for 'earthy' pleasures; here is the *carpe diem* theme in reverse. Anything may have inspired this mood in Milton—a clock,[50] a sermon, the ravages of the plague in Cambridge, or a birthday reflection. The basic idea was common enough; what matters is the amazing way in which he has combined metre and line-length and language to express the yearning of the Christian spirit for perfection beyond the grave. The poem swells rhapsodically to its grand and unforgettable climax.

The evident success of *On Time* may have prompted its author to revive his plan for a series of poems on church holy days. Whether or not it compensated for the failure of *The Passion*, it proved that, given the right subject, Milton could achieve religious verse beyond the *Nativity Ode*. The first of January in 1631 brought the feast-day of the Circumcision, an appropriate topic for a piece to follow the Christmas hymn.[51] Milton decided to attempt it. This time he would avoid writing about himself, although he could begin with a reference to the Nativity, as in the opening stanza of *The Passion*:

> Ye flaming powers and wingèd warriours bright
> That erst with music and triumphant song,
> First heard by happy watchful shepherds' ear,
> So sweetly sung your joy the clouds along
> Through the soft silence of the listening night,
> Now mourn . . .

The apparent freedom of riming in these lines is misleading; actually, Milton had committed himself to an exacting form. Having successfully imitated the Italian madrigal, he was now attempting the complex stanzas found in Petrarch's long (137 lines) *canzone* to the Blessed Virgin.[52] They involved intricate riming and lines of irregular length:

> Now mourn, and if sad share with us to bear
> Your fiery essence can distil no tear,
> Burn in your sighs and borrow
> Seas wept from our deep sorrow:
> He who with all heaven's heraldry whilere
> Entered the world, now bleeds to give us ease.
> Alas, how soon our sin
> Sore doth begin
> His infancy to seize!

According to Milton's model the following stanzas had to be exact duplications of the first, rime for rime, line-length for line-length. The rigidity of the pattern evidently proved to be a handicap, for parts of the second stanza seem forced:

> O more exceeding love, or law more just?
> Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!
> For we by rightful doom remédiless
> Were lost in death, till He that dwelt above

High throned in secret bliss, for us frail dust
Emptied His glory, even to nakedness;
And that great Covenant which we still transgress
Entirely satisfied,
And the full wrath beside
Of vengeful justice bore for our excess,
And seals obedience first with wounding smart
This day; but oh! ere long
Huge pangs and strong
Will pierce more near His heart.

Here Milton stopped, attempting no more stanzas. He never tried such a complicated form again. And he wrote no more poems for church holy days.

Instead, though we do not know how soon thereafter, he returned to the madrigal-like verse-paragraph used in *On Time*, with its freely produced irregular lines, its cumulative emotion, and its climaxing alexandrine. This form gave him, not only more freedom, but also the chance to build steadily to some special effect. Again he chose a religious theme, but one close to his own experience, one about which he felt deeply. He had long been attracted by vocal music (witness the *Nativity Ode* and the Italian sonnets), and the singing of hymns particularly affected him. The harmonious blending of the human voice with beautiful poetry seemed to him man's nearest approach to spiritual perfection. It suggested the 'new song' of Christian souls before the throne of God, which sinful humanity must strive to answer—as once it did 'in first obedience, and their state of good'. A poem could be written expressive of this feeling, a poem beginning

Blest pair of sirens, pledges of heaven's joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, voice and verse . . .

He gave it the title, *At a Solemn Music* (that is, at a concert of sacred music). Before it was polished to his satisfaction, it underwent a number of drastic revisions. Only six lines of the first draft survived in the final version. Not surprisingly, among the six were the two with which the piece began.[53]

*At a Solemn Music* invites comparison, in its finished form, with *On Time*. In the new poem, which is slightly longer than its metrical predecessor (but exactly the length of *Upon the Circumcision*), Milton used fewer short lines but used those few with striking effectiveness. Again creating a tone of breathless, rising emotion, he abandoned his former device of a delayed rime to emphasize the climaxing alexandrine, and used the device —with greatly increased suspension—to achieve an even more remarkable emphasis in the body of the poem:

And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbèd song of pure concent

Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne
To Him that sits thereon
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee,
Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow
And the cherubic host in thousand choirs
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly . . .

Here the rime answering to 'jubilee' is withheld for six lines and comes, at last, like a far-off echo in infinite space. Aided by cunning syntax it gives the short line, 'Singing everlastingly', a sound appropriate to the words.

The second movement is regularly pentameter with uninterrupted couplet rimes, except for the alexandrine, which is as perfect and sure as any that Milton ever wrote. Through skilful use of run-on lines the emotion builds to an exclamation, which then sweeps us on to the alexandrine:

That we on earth with undiscording voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise,
As once we did, till disproportioned sin
Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good!
O may we soon again renew that song
And keep in tune with heaven, till God erelong
To His celestial consort us unite
To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light!

The conclusion, with its Christian assurance of immortality, reminds us of *On Time*, which is even more concerned with the apocalyptic promise. Both poems reflect the various symbols of perfection which fascinated Milton in his religion. Both speak of sin, but they are essentially poems of adoration, adoration for an ideal. Only a person insensitive to throbbing rhythms and mounting gladness would think these verses didactic. Milton tells us at the outset that the singing voice is a pledge 'of heaven's joy'. But he is not only praising music and poetry; he is dreaming of a better world and the divine goodness upon which it must be modelled.

*On Time*, *Upon the Circumcision*, and *At a Solemn Music* satisfied for some time Milton's desire to write religious verse. It would seem that their composition answered some inner need, resulting, probably, from another period of spiritual stocktaking. Early in 1631 (before 25 March if his own dating is precise) he was busy writing a very different kind of poem for publication.[54] Arrangements were being made for the printing of a second folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, and the publishers were seeking commendatory verses for the volume. It is uncertain how they came to hear of the young Cambridge student; indeed, we do not positively know that they asked him to contribute, though it seems highly probable. Unlike most of the poets and poetasters of his age, Milton wrote only one tribute for the work of a fellow poet. It was an appealing coincidence that he praised the only man in English letters whose name was to stand above his own in the verdict of posterity. Too much can be made of the fact, however. His poem *On Shakespeare* is one of his poorest, stiffly conventional and singularly uninformative. It is built around a conceit which other poets had used and exhausted, and it tells us almost nothing of Milton's attitude toward his subject. Shakespeare is praised, of course; that is what the verses were supposed to do. He is 'my Shakespeare' (which implies nothing); his bones are 'honoured' (which makes Milton's question about them purely rhetorical); his relics are 'hallowed' (like those of a saint); he is a 'son of Memory'. We are told, moreover, that his lines are 'Delphic' (in other words, poetic), and that they flow easily. Milton does not even suggest that he was a dramatist; as a matter of fact, his tribute was later printed with the 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*, where it probably seemed more appropriate. A remarkable thing—this eulogy of a great playwright without a single reference to his plays. If Milton's intention was to compliment Shakespeare without going on record as an admirer of the theatre, he did a neat job of it. But such speculation leads one to wonder why he wrote the poem in the first place.[55]

*On Shakespeare* is a sixteen-line epigram in heroic couplets. Its verse-form, and its idea, were very probably suggested by Ben Jonson's tribute in the 1623 folio, which contains the striking compliment:

> Thou art a monument without a tomb,
> And art alive still while thy book doth live,
> And we have wits to read and praise to give.

It would be indeed surprising if Milton did not look at this and other commendatory poems in the First Folio before writing his own. It is also possible that he saw William Browne's recently published (1629) elegy on the Countess of Pembroke, with its memorable conceit:

> Marble piles let no man raise
> To her name: for after-days
> Some kind woman born as she,
> Reading this, like Niobe
> Shall turn marble, and become
> Both her mourner and her tomb.

In any case, Milton's epigram is hardly a performance of great originality. Its chief significance lies in revelation of its author's state of mind. It contrasts Shakespeare's 'easy numbers' with the 'slow-endeavouring art' of others. And it shows Milton willing to appear in print, willing to conform to a conventional pattern. In a sense, it is his first bid for public recognition. The bid was timid and anonymous; but it was made. Whatever his future plans, he now thinks of himself as definitely a poet and not just a schoolboy writing verses. He now challenges comparison with other poets. He has emerged from the study; he has travelled the long road from Cambridge and Harefield to London.

In the year 1631, his last full year at Cambridge, Milton wrote as though he had been 'sealed' of the Tribe of Ben Jonson. There is no evidence that he ever knew personally the man whose learning he was to praise in *L'Allegro*; there is no evidence that he ever visited the Apollo Room of the Devil and St. Dunstan tavern, where Jonson and his 'sons' held forth. But Milton's poetry of 1631, like his *Arcades* of a year or so before, shows distinct traces of the Jonsonian influence. It is not pure imitation, such as one might expect from a new and ardent disciple. It is a subtler thing: a pronounced fondness for the favourite rhythms of the 'Sons of Ben', an increased simplicity and economy of diction, a tone of whimsy or of courtly gallantry. Milton wrote no sonnets, no elaborate Italianate stanzas in this period; but, like some of Jonson's other followers, he toyed occasionally with pictorial conceits, and even showed a passing interest in the intellectual conceit later to be misnamed 'metaphysical'. In other words, he was becoming more aware of contemporary poetry. Jonson, with his insistence upon directness and lucidity, had been content to say merely, 'Thou art a monument without a tomb'; but Milton, venturing to be more ingenious in the 'metaphysical' manner, expressed it:

> Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving
> Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,
> And so sepûlchred in such pomp dost lie
> That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

This, whether or not it owes anything to John Donne (who died on 31 March 1631), is a passage that requires a little reflection.

The year 1631 saw also a sally of Milton's muse into the seldom visited areas of humorous verse.[56] On 13 January, when the Lent term of the University began, the returning dons and students missed a long-familiar face. Thomas Hobson, the old Cambridge carrier, had died during the Christmas vacation (on 1 January). Milton, like thousands of others at the University, must have ridden with Hobson between Cambridge and the Bull tavern in Bishopsgate Street, London; and like generations of students he must have besieged Hobson often in hopes of mail from home. He may even, when mood or necessity led him to hire a horse, have been presented with 'Hobson's choice'—which Englishmen long remembered as the horse nearest the stable door and no choice at all. Hobson had lived to be almost eighty-six, and he was as well known to the University community as the River Cam itself. He was a landmark, an institution. When he died, something picturesque and familiar disappeared from life. Or—as some undergraduate probably said—something stable was gone.

Hobson, as a town 'character', was inevitably a subject for jokes. We know little about his personality, but it is clear that he was regarded with a youthful mixture of affection and humour. His death was the signal for an outburst of poetizing, most of which, perhaps in a spirit of reaction to the grim events of the preceding year, seems to have been rather waggish. Especially noticeable was a tendency to pun on the particulars of Hobson's occupation and the circumstances of his death. He had died after a rare period of inactivity forced upon him by the plague. Hobson the postman, for example, was memorialized in this seemingly unkind quatrain:

Hobson (what's out of sight is out of mind!)
Is gone, and left his letters here behind;
He that with so much paper used to meet
Is now, alas, content to take one sheet.

He was recognized as a fruitful subject for poetry in these verses, probably by Thomas Randolph:

Charon, take Hobson's ghost and let it pass
By the land the same that it by water was.
Thy cousin ghost, a sprite to poets dear,
To Elysium waft, a jocund mariner,
He'll pay the royal fare, deny this pain
And he shall ride to heav'n in his own wain.

Jokes about Hobson's wain and the astronomical Charles's Wain were evidently very common. As another versifier put it:

If constellations which in heaven are fixed
Give power by influence to these bodies mixed
Or every sign peculiar right doth claim
Of that to which it propagates a name,
Then I conjecture Charles the northern swain
Whistled up Hobson for to drive his wain.
He is not dead, but left his mansion here;
He has left the Bull and flitted to the Bear.

This same poet knows (it seems to have been common knowledge) that Hobson's industry had made him prosperous:

Methinks I see how Charon's finger itches,
Hoping to fetch him over for his riches;
But he may hope and starve in hope at last,
For I am sure the heavens will hold him fast.

Still another writer sums up the matter with wit and something approaching tenderness:

Here Hobson lies, amongst his many betters,
A man not learnèd, yet a man of letters.
The scholars well can testify as much
Who have received them from his pregnant pouch.
His carriage was well known oft t'have begun
In embassy twixt father and the son.
In Cambridge few (in good time be it spoken)
But will remember him by some good token.
From thence to London rode he day by day
Till, death benighting him, he lost his way.
No wonder is it that he thus is gone
Since most men knew he long was drawing on.
His team was of the best, nor could he have
Been mired in any ground but in the grave;
And there he sticks indeed, still like to stand,
Until some angel lend his helping hand.
So rest in peace, thou ever-toiling swain,
And supreme waggoner next to Charles's Wain.

So the verses ran.[57]

Milton's mood in 1631 led him to join in this chorus, and the results are proof incontrovertible that he was, on occasion, capable of humour without moroseness or acrimony. His touch was light; his tone was whimsical; his wit was of the variety most popular in that period. He liked his subject so well that he wrote, not one, but at least two poems *On the University Carrier*. The first begins vigorously:

Here lies old Hobson. Death hath broke his girt
And here, alas, hath laid him in the dirt;
Or else the ways being foul, twenty to one,
He's here stuck in a slough and overthrown.

This is an arresting, if not exactly respectful, way to talk about a man's grave. It is followed by an exaggerated allusion to the old carrier's reckless driving:

'Twas such a shifter that, if truth were known,
Death was half glad when he had got him down,
For he had any time this ten years full
Dodged with him betwixt Cambridge and the Bull.
And surely Death could never have prevailed
Had not his weekly course of carriage failed.

Then the mood changes. Death is thought of as the chamberlain of an inn, who in his 'kind office' showed Hobson

his room where he must lodge that night,
Pulled off his boots, and took away the light.
If any ask for him, it shall be said,
Hobson has supped and's newly gone to bed.

It would be difficult to find in all of English poetry a gentler, kindlier description of death.

Milton's 'second' Hobson poem is longer and more ingenious. Its wit does not sparkle; it explodes. There are ponderous puns, such as:

Ease was his chief disease, and to judge right,
He died for heaviness that his cart went light.

There is also paradox or word-play posing as paradox:

Rest, that gives all men life, gave him his death,
And too much breathing put him out of breath;
Nor were it contradiction to affirm
Too long vacation hastened on his term.

The poem is never metaphysical as Donne is metaphysical, yet there are passages involving both unusual and logical comparisons:

Made of sphere-metal, never to decay
Until his revolution was at stay.
Time numbers motion, yet (without a crime
'Gainst old truth) motion numbered out his time;
And like an engine moved with wheel and weight,
His principles being ceased, he ended straight.

Here the ideas come thick and fast, and the reader must be alert in order to follow. Such writing was not in the strict Jonsonian tradition, but it was practised by many poets of the first half of the seventeenth century who may have thought that they were 'Sons of Ben'. Milton was inventing nothing; he was using a style then and later popularized by Randolph, Carew, Lovelace, the young Cowley, and others—a style observable in the pre-religious verse of Henry Vaughan.

The Hobson poems were undoubtedly aimed at a student audience. Like the *Vacation Exercise* they are evidence of genuine sociability, of a willingness to amuse. Milton did not write them because he was moved by Hobson's death; he wrote them in a spirit of participation. He competed with his contemporaries in pleasant mediocrity, and never regretted the results. His eagerness and enthusiasm are shown by the fact (which is worth emphasizing) of two—possibly three—poems on the same subject. The first must have been warmly applauded by his friendly audience. Both were later printed, anonymously, in a popular collection of humorous verse, *Wit Restor'd in severall Select Poems* (1658); and the second appeared in another such anthology, *A Banquet of Jests* (1640 and 1657). Both were also collected in manuscript. It is thus a pleasant irony that John Milton's light verse was known and enjoyed in his own time before *Paradise Lost* and its overwhelming theme obscured his varied talents.[58]

*An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* belongs to the same period as the Hobson poems. It, too, was almost certainly written at the University, presumably during the Easter term (20 April–8 July), for Milton explained that the flowers and bays of his poetical tribute were 'Sent thee from the banks of Came, / Devoted to thy virtuous name'. The marriage in 1622 of Jane Savage and John Paulet, Lord St. John, had combined two ancient and distinguished families, conspicuous for their Roman Catholicism. Their first child, a son, had been born ('after years of barrenness') in 1629, the year in which Paulet had become fifth Marquess of Winchester. In 1631 they were expecting another child, when the Marchioness had an abscess on her cheek lanced, and died of the infection, 15 April, after being delivered of a dead boy. The poignancy of this tragedy prompted verses from Jonson, Davenant, and other poets. The Marchioness was only twenty-three. Cambridge was concerned, not only because of the lady's beauty and virtue, but also because she had been a close friend and kinswoman of Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, Chancellor of the University. Her husband was an Oxford man, but his younger brother, Henry, had been a short time at Cambridge, having been admitted to Peterhouse in 1618. Perhaps Milton and other students expected a miscellany to be published.[59]

It has been supposed that Jonson and others wrote memorial verses because at the time of the Marchioness' death 'she was inclining to become a Protestant'; but there is an elegy on her by Walter Colman, a Roman Catholic poet:

> Instruct my pen with an immortal verse
> Whilst holy tears enamel thy sad hearse;
> Sweet saint on earth, in heaven no less we know
> Thy beauty here, there goodness makes thee so.
> I rather should direct my prayers to thee
> Than study to compose an elegy,
> Teaching the world with confidence they must
> Perform their vows to thy religious dust
> With many a weary step, to know what shall
> Unto their long protracted hopes befall.
>
> . . .
>
> How many glorious branches might have sprung
> From thee so good, so beautiful, and young.
> They were mistaken in their count, I fear,
> And numbered every virtue for a year.

Jonson's formal elegy is no less fulsome in its praise; the lady's untimely death genuinely affected poets of different religious convictions. Why it should have affected Milton is not so clear, but a little speculation will do no harm. We may notice, for example, that he was only one year younger than the Marchioness, a fact that may have made him conscious of his own precarious career. Early in his poem he gives an odd emphasis to her age:

> Summers three times eight save one
> She had told—alas, too soon,

After so short time of breath,
To house with darkness, and with death.

This is not quite accurate: literally, she had lived through twenty-four summers, though she was still twenty-three (almost twenty-four) when she died. (Twenty-four was a normal age to be entering the ministry.) It is possible, too, that Milton was struck by the contrast between Jane Paulet's death and that of old Hobson, who had died full of years—indeed, 'had his doings lasted as they were, / He had been an immortal carrier'. On the other hand, Milton indulges in no autobiographical asides, but keeps his tone gracefully sympathetic. His *Epitaph* has the careless elegance and polished irregularity of a Cavalier poem; it might have been written by Lovelace or Suckling in one of their better moments. It is self-conscious: 'Here be tears of perfect moan / Wept for thee in Helicon'; it is aristocratic: 'This rich marble doth inter / The honoured wife of Winchester, / A viscount's daughter, an earl's heir'; and it is rich in courtly extravagance. Milton's repeated references to the gentle lady's distinguished lineage make him sound, for the second time in his poetry, like a young man hopeful of patronage. After respectful mention at the outset of her husband, father, and grandfather, he continues to speak of her 'noble birth', her 'high birth', her 'noble house'.

He speaks of the dead Marchioness in the third person through the first forty-six lines of his poem, ending this passage with a long analogy (involving a simile within a simile!) which introduces an authentic tone of tenderness. Then he addresses the lady directly, moving from past to present, from formal grief to real feeling. This technique (in happy contrast with that of the *Fair Infant* elegy) is extremely affecting, but, for some readers, is marred by the poem's ending. Recalling, perhaps, Dante's linking of Beatrice and Rachel as mothers who died in childbed, Milton proposes Rachel's 'story' as analogous to that of the Marchioness. To the very extent that one remembers details of Rachel's story, this concluding analogy is inept and unfortunate; Benjamin lived, and Rachel's husband had children by Rachel's sister and by both their maidservants. Milton promotes the Marchioness to a queen (cf. *Arcades*), but his youthful fondness for comparisons perhaps impoverishes her in the process.

It was probably near the time of his *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* that Milton composed a little song which Henry Lawes put to music.[60] The mood that produced the light-hearted Hobson poems, that made him agree to write *On Shakespeare* for publication, and that led him to pay courtly compliments to the family of Jane Paulet, this mood also made easy and natural the penning of a pure lyric. *On May Morning* could owe something to its author's reading of Jonson; it has the freshness and simplicity, the artful spontaneity, found in the poems of Jonson's disciple, Robert Herrick. On the other hand, it would not look the least out of place in an Elizabethan miscellany or a songbook of the tuneful nineties.

We cannot speak confidently of its 'source'; we can speak only of its holiday spirit, its idyllic charm, its musical grace. However literary its origins, it seems to breathe the loveliness of the English countryside:

Now the bright morning star, day's harbinger,
Comes dancing from the east and leads with her
The flowery May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose.
  Hail, bounteous May, that dost inspire
  Mirth and youth and warm desire!
  Woods and groves are of thy dressing,
  Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.
Thus we salute thee with our early song,
  And welcome thee, and wish thee long.

It is the first of Milton's poems which praises natural beauty seen outside of books. How much observation went into it is irrelevant; we are, for a moment, in a more convincing world than the world of the nightingale sonnet and the *Elegia Quinta*.

Both the song *On May Morning* and the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* are technically interesting, since they contain some bold handling of metre. In both, smooth and regular rhythm is sacrificed for special lyric effects. The *Epitaph* contains almost as many seven-syllable as eight-syllable lines (thirty-four to thirty-eight), and there is only one set of feminine rimes. Monotony is avoided, not only by skilful variation of the number of syllables in the line, but also by variation of the rhythms:

Yet had the number of her days
Been as complete as was her praise,
Nature and fate had had no strife
In giving limit to her life.
Her high birth, and her graces sweet,
Quickly found a lover meet.

Perhaps the most affecting part of the poem comes in the midst of a long lilting passage of seventeen uninterrupted seven-syllable lines:

Gentle lady, may thy grave
Peace and quiet ever have;
After this thy travail sore
Sweet rest seize thee evermore.

Although it is an epitaph, most of this passage has the same lively, swinging rhythm of 'Mirth and youth and warm desire', which Milton, in the next two lines of the *Song*, made even more buoyant by the use of feminine endings:

Woods and groves are of thy dressing,
Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.

Here the 'trochaic feeling' is accentuated by the slight alliteration. *On May*

*Morning* is an especially deft treatment of metre: the first four lines are pentameter; the second four, greeting the season merely discussed in the opening quatrain, are tetrameter; and the concluding couplet, by using *both* measures, has a neat unifying effect.

Milton later wrote more beautiful elegies than the *Epitaph*, and its rhythms were soon to be put to more memorable uses in three new poems. But the little song on May Day, which has the sound of singing for sheer joy, marks a unique point in its author's poetic career. Although the songs of *Arcades* and, later, of *Comus* may be technically more polished, they were written for special occasions, and show it. With *On May Morning* Milton emerged from the April mood of awakening adolescence, and for a fleeting moment we hear him, happy and confident in his youth, welcoming the bounteous season. All too soon he will be lamenting that his 'late spring no bud or blossom shew'th', that he fears to disturb a 'season due'.

The final poetic fruits of his Cambridge days were those twin poems of complementary moods and masterful craftsmanship, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.[61] We do not know precisely when they were written, but certainly they belong near the verses we have been considering. Even if someone convincingly assigns them to 1629 or 1633, we can still say that they represent Milton's mind and art in his last year at Cambridge. The mood of *L'Allegro* is the mood of the Hobson poems and the cheerful song *On May Morning*; the mood of *Il Penseroso* is the serious mood of *On Time* and *At a Solemn Music*. Moreover, the infectious rhythms of both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are the rhythms of the *Song* and the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*. Milton has been moving steadily—as we have seen him move before—toward some poetical *climax* of experimentation in a given form. If the twin poems had not been written, we would probably wonder at their absence. There had been no especially ambitious venture, no masterpiece, for nearly two years, and the striking productivity of 1630 and 1631 lacked a crown; it had neither an *In Quintum Novembris* nor a *Nativity Ode*. Its crown was to be a double poem.

*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are so familiar to most English-speaking people (and to foreigners as well) that it is difficult to see them save through the mist of early impressions. Much ink has been wasted 'explaining' them to readers who, delighted by the dancing rhythms and the memorable combinations of words, felt no need of being edified. It may seriously be questioned if most of these 'explanations' have ever made anyone like the poems better; and there is room for suspicion that many a youthful reader has liked them less after being solemnly told that Il Penseroso is Milton himself (or the lengthening shadow of Puritanism), while L'Allegro is the Cavalier spirit which Milton was soon to condemn to destruction. Surely we have had enough—and more than enough—of the foolish talk about the twin poems representing two possible attitudes toward life, of the over-subtle and unenlightening talk of their being poems of day versus night, of the academic and fussy exposition of each as describing an 'ideal day' of exactly twelve hours.[62]

In all his career Milton never wrote any other verses more catholic or less ambiguous than *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and the conflicting interpretations which have been offered are triumphs of misplaced ingenuity. *L'Allegro* is in praise of mirth, as it plainly announces. L'Allegro himself is, of course, a cheerful person, who finds joy in living. He has no 'philosophy'; he is not a hedonist, seeking mere pleasure, nor is he 'the careless man who goes through life . . . avoiding its dark places, and never stopping to ask what it all means'. To say this is to do what Milton nowhere does, even by implication: it is to make a moral judgement on L'Allegro's activities. We miss the whole point of the characterization if we pronounce L'Allegro as one who views life 'from the standpoint of a child'. He avoids nothing; he simply encounters pleasant things. He is not immature; he is happy. The poem, in essence, is *a gay catalogue of cheering attitudes and happenings*. The choices faced are those that appeal to the human mind in a certain mood; they are not forced by events or emotions. The poem does not record an 'ideal day', for the enjoyments mentioned are not successive (save in an artistic sense); indeed, they are sometimes alternative, and the season ranges from spring to harvest. (Anyone who tried to crowd into twelve hours the experiences mentioned in *L'Allegro* would probably end up more melancholy than Il Penseroso.) The catalogue is a catalogue, not a calendar or an indictment.

*Il Penseroso* is in praise of 'melancholy', as it plainly announces. Il Penseroso himself is, therefore, a pensive person, who *enjoys* study and solitude. He, too, has no 'philosophy'; he is not at all a puritanical kill-joy. Like L'Allegro, he acts in the ways that give him most pleasure; hence the poem is a catalogue of attitudes and happenings conducive to this pleasant kind of 'melancholy'. Melancholy, as presented in *Il Penseroso*, is obviously not a passive or negative thing, but a positive state of mind which, like Mirth, seeks its appropriate delights. The reader must not overlook the fact that the sprightly rhythm of *L'Allegro* is used also in *Il Penseroso*—and without incongruity. Il Penseroso is neither Hamlet nor Jaques, nor a creature concocted out of Burton and Bright. He is simply and solely what the poem says he is.

And the poem does not say (or anywhere imply) that he is Milton. If the poet as he grew older came to resemble Il Penseroso more than he resembled L'Allegro, we can, I suppose, remark the fact, although it throws no light whatsoever upon the verses in question, and not a great deal upon Milton. It is even open to serious doubt. In any case, neither poem is intended as a self-portrait, and neither should be taken as such. The poet nowhere calls attention to himself as an individual, and for good reason—he is trying to express moods which all of us, at one time or another, have experienced. On the other hand, Milton necessarily put the stuff of his own experience and observation into the making of both; and having followed him thus far in his artistic development, we can recognize many echoes of previous verses. L'Allegro strolling about, dreaming of beautiful ladies, reminds us of Milton in the first and seventh elegies. When the cheerful one praises 'sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child', we remember an earlier tribute to Shakespeare—as we do again, perhaps, when Il Penseroso tells divinest Melancholy to 'Forget thyself to marble'. We recall the theme of *At a Solemn Music* when we hear the pensive one saying:

There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced choir below
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies
And *bring all heaven before mine eyes.*

Memory may even take us back to Milton's defence of fasting, as appropriate to the poet who will sing of heaven under Jove, when we read:

Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,
And hears the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing.

There is much of this sort of thing in the twin poems. The student of Milton's career will smile with recognition as he encounters a description of Hymen with taper clear (not with 'a scarce-well-lighted flame'), of the nightingale singing in the woods, of 'soft Lydian airs / Married to immortal verse'.

Both L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are Milton, then, in the same sense that they are Everyman. They are moods of the same person; they are not different persons. They are complementary, rather than sharply antithetic. A little checking will show that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso have a good deal in common. In both moods we (and Milton) are fond of drama, music, impressive architecture, walking, and natural beauty. In both moods we love the old familiar stories (particularly that of Orpheus), we seek our pleasure, and we enjoy day-dreaming 'on summer eves by haunted stream'. Il Penseroso has no monopoly on reflection; L'Allegro has no monopoly on delight. Neither poem is in the least morbid, and there is no conflict mentioned or understood. The 'loathèd melancholy' which is banished in the burlesque introduction to *L'Allegro* is not the melancholy portrayed in *Il Penseroso*; the 'vain deluding joys' banished in *Il Penseroso* are a different breed from those invoked in *L'Allegro*. There is no tension anywhere, no temperamental bias. Milton toys with the mask of Janus to entertain his readers, and removes it only after saying:

These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

Victorian criticism, not Milton, added the postscript:

Here's a pretty antiphon,
But only one is really John.

It's enough to make L'Allegro weep and Il Penseroso laugh.

Tillyard did Milton studies a great service when he pointed out (in 1932) that the twin poems are indebted to the technique of the prolusion, or academic exercise, as Milton learned it at Cambridge. He gave us, for the first time, a new and stimulating way of looking at them, and made us conscious of the student audience at which they were almost certainly aimed. No one should ever again read the bombastic exordium of *L'Allegro* without recognizing it as burlesque, as humorous exaggeration, intended to amuse. The complementary moods of the two poems become more meaningful now that we have been reminded of the debating technique in which Milton was trained, a technique which prepared the disputant to support impartially either side of a given question.[63]

Were the poems written for any special occasion? It is just possible that they were composed to be read at a vacation exercise in July 1631. Milton need not again have served as master of ceremonies; someone, remembering his verse contribution to the earlier celebration, could have asked him to take part in the programme. Doubtless he attended these annual parties, and what could be more appropriate to an evening of academic merry-making than a poetical debate on the virtues of mirth and melancholy? When he had spoken before, he had attempted to 'praise mirth in a serious style', in prose, according to the prolusion technique. (This hypothesis is surely more plausible than the argument that Milton was prompted to write by the Declaration of Sports, of 10 October 1633.[64])

Milton's earlier poetic 'debate'—on the merits of feasting and fasting—had been composed for the entertainment of Charles Diodati. Could Diodati, by any chance, have been responsible for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*? The Italian titles of these verses suggest that he (or Emilia) might. One of the undated letters from Diodati quoted near the beginning of this chapter[65] could easily have provided the spark.

Scholars have not been remiss in tracking down 'sources' for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*,[66] but the closest parallel thus far unearthed is the one earliest suggested, Robert Burton's *Abstract of Melancholy* published with his *Anatomy*.[67] Here the rime pattern, the metre, and some of the ideas are similar:

When to my self I act and smile,
With pleasing thoughts the time beguile,
By a brook side or wood so green,
Unheard, unsought for, or unseen,

A thousand pleasures do me bless,
And crown my soul with happiness.
  All my joys besides are folly,
  None so sweet as Melancholy.

Or again:

Methinks I hear, methinks I see
Sweet music, wondrous melody,
Towns, palaces, and cities fine;
Here now, then there; the world is mine,
Rare beauties, gallant ladies shine,
Whate'er is lovely or divine.
  All other joys to this are folly,
  None so sweet as Melancholy.

One or two extracts, however, give a misleading impression of Burton's poem, which is not (like Milton's) in praise of melancholy, but rather a neat weighing of melancholy's sweet and sour. Milton probably owed little, if anything, to it. His verse form he had already used in the May song and the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, and his ideas are similar to Burton's only in an inevitable way. As a matter of fact, he assigns to Mirth some of the pleasures which Burton assigns to Melancholy.

The twin poems reveal Milton, therefore, near the close of his University days, as an original artist. Readers do not need to be reminded that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are masterpieces of construction and diction and metrics. Indeed, critics have tended to overstress the parallels of outline and make the verses seem more artificial than in fact they are. The parallels are chiefly at the beginning and end, where they are most easily recognized; the middle portions of the poems are neither similar nor sharply contrasting. Even at the beginning, there is nothing in *L'Allegro* to correspond to the two detailed descriptions of Melancholy in *Il Penseroso* (lines 11–21, 31–44), particularly Milton's sympathetic portrait of a nun; and at the end there is nothing in *L'Allegro* to correspond to Il Penseroso's hope for a hermit-like old age (for which the portrait of the nun has artistically prepared us). The true parallels are obvious and immediately recognizable, as they should be. Each poem begins by banishing the opposite (not complementary) mood in ten lines whose language and metre plainly contrast with what immediately follows. Then the desirable mood is invoked, its imaginary descent traced, and its appropriate companions invited. The attentive reader may next notice that L'Allegro thinks of the lark, the morning cock, and the baying hounds, while Il Penseroso thinks of the nightingale. He will certainly observe that L'Allegro goes for a walk in the early morning and Il Penseroso at night. There the parallels fade, except for students with notebooks and over-curious minds. The closing couplet of each poem is, of course, similar in sentiment, and is preceded (although not immediately preceded in

*Il Penseroso*) by praise of suitable music.[68] Any additional echoes—such as the mention of drama, or the boy dreaming by the brook—are incidental and not organic. The twin poems were not built according to a rigid outline. They are not identical twins; each has an individuality of his own. L'Allegro is homelier. Il Penseroso is taller.

Metrically the poems mark a notable advance over the *Marchioness of Winchester*—a surer touch, a greater control of subtlety and variety. To argue whether or not some of the lines are trochaic or iambic is prosodic quibbling; we know that they *read right* and dance their way into our memories. The real triumph of the poems is their perfect union of appropriate rhythms with appropriate language. The diction is simple Anglo-Saxon English, lucid but economical;[69] the verses have substance; there are no wasted words. Jonson had found a sturdy son; nothing Milton had hitherto composed has more crispness and clarity. Apart from a few minor problems of syntax, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are forthright and uncomplicated, with meaning always close to the surface. Their tone is social and friendly. Whether it is L'Allegro or Il Penseroso talking, the tone of what is said is general, not personal. The meditative man is never alone, for the reader has joined him in spirit.

No, L'Allegro is not Milton; but the poem is lively with Milton's sense of well-being in his last year at Cambridge. Its cheerfulness is not a simulated and metrical cheerfulness, but a mood born of zestful observation and pleasurable reading. Il Penseroso is not Milton; but his serenity has been borrowed from Milton, and his love of study and of quiet reflection is Milton's too. The twin poems were created by a young man of healthy sensibility, who had looked upon life and found it good. Particularly he had come to know the value of leisure. Paradise was not yet lost.[70]

Of the non-literary life of this young man in the year 1631 there is little to report. His brother Christopher, now fifteen, was admitted to Christ's College as a pupil of Nathaniel Tovey on 15 February.[71] Diodati was still a student at Geneva. At some time during the year Milton purchased a copy of Aratus,[72] and perhaps was presented with a watch.[73] On 19 February his little niece, Elizabeth Phillips, was buried—but he composed no other *Fair Infant* elegy to mark the event.[74] On 26 April his father was sued in Chancery by a former client, Mrs. Rose Downer.[75] On 12 August Anne's husband, Edward Phillips, made a will with the scrivener's assistance, and soon afterwards died; he was buried on 25 August, and the will was proved on 12 September.[76] About two months after his death, his widow gave birth to another child, her second to be christened John.[77] These fragments of information might be very illuminating if we knew anything about their implications or about their emotional impact on the poet; but Milton mentioned none of them in writing.

He did, however, pen a glowing account of his own summer vacation, spent somewhere in the country. In a College oration which stressed the need of leisure for intellectual development, he declared: 'I myself call to witness the woods and streams, and the beloved village elms under which last summer, I still remember with delight, I enjoyed the highest favour of the Muses (if I may tell the secrets of goddesses). There, amid fields and woodland solitudes, I felt that I experienced a season of growth in seclusion.'[78] We do not know where Milton spent the summer of 1631, but if he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* while thus relishing the quiet of country life, we can agree that he indeed enjoyed 'the highest favour of the Muses'.

When he returned to Cambridge in the autumn, he began his final year as a student, and found himself involved in the various College and University exercises required for the M.A. degree. Perhaps at this time, perhaps earlier, he composed his *Naturam non pati senium*, a vigorous poetic argument that the natural world is not subject to old age.[79] The question was a popular one, with opinion nearly equally divided. Milton's attack on the theory of degeneracy is written with considerable verve, and may represent his own feelings, but we cannot be sure. The energy is poetic; the verses are quite impersonal; and Milton's mood might have enabled him to write with the same enthusiasm in rebuttal, if rebuttal had been assigned him. The chief reason for believing that the poem expresses a personal attitude is that he later (in 1645) published it. The same thing may be said about his Latin verses on the Platonic Idea as it was understood by Aristotle (*De Idea Platonica*), also an academic exercise of some sort.[79] It is a gay and good-natured burlesque of the extreme Aristotelian view, achieved by the poet's speaking in the person of one too literal-minded to grasp Plato's doctrine of Archetypes. Where, Milton asks in mock seriousness, is the archetype of man to be found? The nine Muses and their mother, Memory, do not know who he is. Does he live on the moon? Does he walk about as a giant in some remote corner of the earth? He was unknown to Tiresias and Mercury and Hermes Trismegistus. Obviously, therefore, he is fictional; and Plato, who invented him, had better join the fanciful poets whom he once exiled from his ideal state. There is no room in the sensible world for such imaginative nonsense. Milton keeps a straight face throughout this refutation, and only the mildly ironic tone and the title of the poem give us the key to his satirical intent. Indeed, it is barely possible that Milton was forced to state the Aristotelian view poetically and, finding it uncongenial, wrote with tongue in cheek. The title could have been added later.

College students in every age have a fondness for humorous poetry, but Milton's talent was never for *vers de société*. This is not to say that he lacked a sense of humour. On the contrary, he had a sharp satiric wit and a certain gift for burlesque; he enjoyed, and could express eloquently, the more extravagant incongruities of life. In the gusto of controversy his combative spirit could be Rabelaisian, without the grosser indecency of

Rabelais. Together with a broad, heavy-handed humour, which found its most natural outlet in sarcastic parenthesis and mocking comment, his nature embraced, paradoxically, a strain of geniality and playfulness. When sure of himself and of his audience, he could indulge in light irony, touched with tenderness. Milton did not lack a sense of humour, but his sense of humour lacked range. It also lacked confidence. Never at the beginning but sometimes near the end of a period of sustained productivity come verses designed to make his auditors smile. Such verses have, especially in his youth, a nervous energy born of uncertainty. Milton was always as sensitive about his limitations as he was proud of his abilities. He seemed to realize that many forms of humour were beyond his powers. But humour in any form is more social than tears, and his various attempts at humour imply a friendly audience.

The subjects which Milton had to debate in his prose exercises for the degree[80] were sometimes a severe strain on the academic gravity expected of him. Having to defend the thesis that in the destruction of any substance there is no resolution into primary matter, he argued *a priori* in the best medieval fashion, but finally interrupted his dialectic to say, 'I am not sure whether I have bored *you*, but I have certainly bored myself!' Then, continuing: 'It remains for me to deal with the arguments of my opponents, and may the Muses grant that I reduce *them* to primary matter, or, if possible, to nothingness.' On another occasion, having to prove that day is more excellent than night, he declared that the subject was better suited for a poem than for a disputation. Not taking his topic seriously, he used it as an excuse for rhetorical flights and amusing quibbles about mythology. Was Night storming the radiant ramparts of Day? Was this a war of the gods? No, it was merely a womanish squabble with words, and if he talked too long, his audience would say that his day was a whole summer solstice in midwinter. As for the old fable that Phanes fell in love with Night, he must have faced a phenomenal scarcity of females if it were true.

Once, in the Public Schools of the University, he had to defend the thesis that partial forms do not occur in an animal in addition to the whole. It was plainly an uncongenial subject, but he tackled it soberly, citing Aristotle and Chrysostom Javello, and arguing in the prescribed manner. He did not try to be humorous; he indulged, instead, in a long exordium on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Just when his listeners were beginning to wonder if they had heard rightly the subject for debate, he explained that he had introduced so much history as an analogy to the victories of error over truth in the universities. Looking at his opponents on the rostrum, he added: 'This fact you can observe in today's question, which has enlisted champions of no mean ability—men who might win fame if they would abandon their present position and honour the truth.'[81]

On another occasion in the Schools he spoke for about half an hour on a more congenial subject, an attack on the whole scholastic philosophy—by implication an attack on the educational system at Cambridge. Begging his listeners 'to open less assiduously those huge and ponderous tomes of the so-called subtle doctors, and to study less zealously the crabbed controversies of the sophists', he proceeded with enthusiasm to demonstrate 'that these studies neither delight nor instruct nor promote any common good'. Scholasticism, he argued, leads only to endless and futile quibbling; it adds nothing to knowledge, contributes nothing to the adornment of literature; its fruit is the manufacture of trifles and a more expert ignorance. People who devote themselves to its subtleties appear like children when they attempt any practical subject. A nation is most enriched and honoured by eloquent speech and brave action, but scholastic philosophy develops neither. Its material is tedious writing by monkish old men; its style is low and lifeless. Hercules had a pleasant task cleaning out the Augean stables compared with the duty, imposed on university students, of reading the scholastic philosophers. What had this produced beyond perpetual bickering in the schools? Rhetoric, on the other hand, was a profitable subject for study, as was also history. In contrast to scholasticism, 'divine poetry, by its heaven-sent power, elevates the mind buried in earthy dust and sets it among the skyey mansions'. Milton closed with an ardent plea for the study of history and science—as taught by Aristotle.[82]

Milton was in the main expressing his real convictions. We know this, not only from his later pronouncements on the subject, but also from the fact that he dared to make similar statements in other prolusions. Even arguing that in the destruction of anything a resolution into primary matter does not occur, he deplored the effect of scholastic philosophy upon natural science, and declared:

> A student who turns the pages of the philosophers' tomes and wears them out with handling day and night, often departs more uncertain than when he came, for what one writer affirms and believes he has established by a sufficient argument, another confutes or at least seems to confute, and almost indefinitely the one affirms and the other replies. The wretched reader, meanwhile, long tossed and torn as though between two wild beasts, and half dead with boredom, is left at last as at a crossroads, without the slightest notion of which way to turn. As a matter of fact, it may not actually be worth taking the necessary trouble to find out on which side truth really lies, because it is often about very trifling matters that the biggest controversies are carried on by hundreds of these philosophers.[83]

Having delivered himself of this blast, Milton then plunged into his dull topic, pretending from time to time, by way of amusing his audience, that the argument was a battle to the death.

A prolusion he must have enjoyed writing and delivering is the briefest of the seven which have survived, a defence of the idea of the music of the spheres. It is a little masterpiece of rhetorical craftsmanship, a deft, thoroughly sophisticated performance, combining banter and bathos, common sense and visions of a better world. He wrote it for an occasion of some importance (perhaps the visit of the King and Queen to Cambridge in March of 1632). He began modestly, warning his hearers that much of his argument was in sport, and asking permission to speak first with 'open hand' before there was argument with 'closed fist'. Briefly, then, he stated that no sane man would think that Pythagoras and Plato meant literally their remarks about the music of the spheres; they meant only to suggest allegorically, like a poet or an oracle, the close interrelation of the heavenly bodies and their eternally uniform revolutions. Aristotle, in a spirit of detraction, had foisted on them the literal doctrine. Even so (and now Milton's tone changed, as he turned lightly to his task of defending the thesis), why should Aristotle object to the doctrine? How else were Aristotle's own 'Intelligences' held to their job of making the heavens rotate, if not by the charm of this melody? How else account for the fortitude of Atlas, for the songs of birds, for the music enjoyed by gods and stars? Why else did Aristotle's meteors dance in the sky, as he said they did? Pythagoras was able to hear the celestial music because he was an exemplary person; that other men do not hear it is due to their imperfections. The Golden Age would return, and we should all hear the harmony of the spheres, if only our hearts were pure. . . . So went the argument, a witty defence within a common-sense denial. It was a disputation with a difference. Milton used, of course, ideas also expressed in his *Nativity Ode*, *Arcades*, and *At a Solemn Music*, but he treated them here in a context of intelligent urbanity.[84]

His oratorical defence of the superiority of day over night, delivered one morning in the chapel of his own College, contains several passages which have interested his biographers. He began by avowedly breaking a rule which he and his audience had been carefully taught: 'All the most eminent masters of rhetoric have left behind the opinion—which has not escaped you, fellow-students—that in every kind of speaking, demonstrative, deliberative, or judicial, one must begin by winning the goodwill of his listeners; otherwise he cannot persuade, cannot succeed in his purpose as he wishes. If this is so—and truly I know that all scholars agree in regarding it as axiomatic—then alas for me! To what distress am I reduced today!' Here, certainly, was a provocative beginning; and what followed can be interpreted in several ways. One can take it very literally (despite the somewhat mocking tone of the opening words) and believe that Milton spoke of himself as personally disliked by most of his audience. Or one can suspect that, having decided to be outrageous, he pretended to assume an audience hostile to his thesis, unanimously preferring the pleasures of night to those of day:

> At the very outset of my speech I fear I shall have to break the rules of oratory and deviate from the first and chief duty of an orator, because how can I hope for your goodwill when in all this assembly I see only persons who are hostile to me?

> I seem to come as a persuader to the unpersuadables. So great can be the rivalry in hostile encounters even in the schools, among those pursuing either different studies or different opinions in the same studies. . . . But truly my soul cannot wholly despair, for I see here and there, if I am not mistaken, some who clearly show me by their quiet countenances that they wish me well. The approval of these, however few, I value more than that of the numberless company of the ignorant, who have no brains, no reasoning power, no sound judgement, and who betray themselves by their boasting and their ridiculous froth of words. Take away their patchwork borrowed from modern authors, and, immortal God! you will find them quite empty . . .

These words, we must remember, were not spoken impromptu; they were deliberately committed to paper, with mocking forethought. Even Heraclitus, Milton went on, would laugh if he could hear these students with nothing to say, who, in their grammar schools, learned to spout lines from a tragedy of Euripides and then, their parrot eloquence exhausted, crawled off quite unheroically.

> But to get back to the point, having digressed ever so slightly [*paululum*], if there is anyone here who refuses peace on any terms and declares war to the death against me, I will not disdain to beg and entreat him to put aside his animosity for a while, become an impartial judge in this debate, and not allow the speaker's fault (if such there be) to prejudice the best and worthiest of causes. And if you think I have spoken with too much sharpness and bitterness, I confess I have done so intentionally . . .

Why? 'I wanted the beginning of my speech to resemble the gloomy clouds of early dawn, preceding the fairest day.'[85]

Milton is not the only Englishman who ever insulted his audience in order to gain its attention, but it is amusing to find him employing the device. His defence of day is commonplace enough, except for a few passages of rhetorical exuberance; he tries to demonstrate that Day is of nobler and more ancient birth than Night, and of greater service to mankind. To prove the first he has the difficult task of dismissing the Greek poets as incompetent witnesses. To prove the second he entertains his audience by burlesquing the terrors of night, ridiculing his opponent, and rhapsodizing on the virtues of daylight. He does not hesitate to puncture his most poetical passage with bathos: 'I call you to witness, fellow-students, how delightful, how welcome, how long-awaited is the morn, recalling you to the gentler muses from whom night separated you, still thirsty and unsatisfied.' If this was not greeted with grins, and maybe a few good-natured jeers, students in the seventeenth century were strange creatures indeed.[86]

Reading Milton's prolusions today, we are in danger of missing the ironic or mocking tone in many of his sentences. Like all his classmates, he mastered the trick of citing authorities and, in particular, of invoking the magical name of Aristotle; but he was even capable of quoting Aristotle and saying, 'If anybody refuses to accept this opinion, I can, of course, indict him for heresy!'[87] His *Prolusiones Oratoriae* exhibit his constant awareness of his audience, which, compelled to attend these endless disputations, must have been difficult to please. We feel that Milton is very much on his mettle, by turns witty and outrageous, modest and mocking, but striving always to hold attention. His humour may often be strained, and his wit not brilliant, but it was good for him, no doubt, to have humour and wit forced from his fertile mind. Most of his jokes were engagingly obvious; he was subtler when he essayed flights of rhetoric or exploited the common ground of mythology, for his art and learning enabled him to rise above the expected. On the other hand, all his exercises reflect the narrowness of the curriculum, the zeal of contradiction and intense self-centredness of the university community. He learned to argue as one in complete possession of the truth, combating the forces of ignorance and error—whatever the subject, or his side of it. He learned to anticipate rebuttal and to ridicule the position of his opponents. Whatever his private opinion of these methods of controversy, he was never to outgrow them. His public utterances in future years were to exhibit the same scholastic appeal to authority, the same arguments from analogy, the same uncompromising tone.

Milton's final academic exercise in his College was a long oration. When it loomed as a major interruption to the reading in which he was absorbed (and which he regarded as far more important than routine disputations), he was much annoyed. In a petulant mood he proposed as a theme for dispute the question whether Art or Ignorance brought greater blessings to mankind. His sardonic intent was to defend Ignorance, as not subject to the irritations of academic requirements. To his surprise, and ultimate relief, someone turned the tables on him; the subject was accepted, but he was assigned the defence of Art. Accepting this ironic twist as almost providential, he began composing the oration. It grew in length as his enthusiasm mounted; finding himself writing on a thoroughly congenial topic for a change, he let himself go. The result was a speech considerably longer than custom dictated. The result was also a piece which must rank today among Milton's major works in prose.[88]

His *Oratio pro Arte* is a passionate, intensely personal expression of the ardour for learning which characterizes Renaissance humanism at its peak. A fierce joy and high idealism animate its periods. Milton speaks out more openly than in anything he has hitherto written, verse or prose. He damns the whole Cambridge system of education. He emphasizes the artist's need for almost universal knowledge as background, and offers his conviction that leisure is essential to intellectual development. Explicitly he praises the kinds of learning which seem to him most important—history, natural science, logic and rhetoric freed from scholastic nonsense. He stresses the potential influence of the educated and enlightened individual and, by unmistakable implication, avows his own ambitions to become a great writer. He gives clear, eloquent utterance to ideas which he will reaffirm, later, in *Lycidas* and the tractate *Of Education*. Echoing Plato and Bacon, and perhaps Montaigne, the *Oratio pro Arte* is an expansive, unabashed confession of faith in man's ability to conquer nature, to reform society, and to glorify God by development of the human intellect to its challenging, still unachieved limits.

The oration begins on a personal note; in his most disarming manner Milton takes his audience into his confidence, explaining his attitude toward all academic exercises as interruptions of valuable work, his conviction that orators and poets should be mature in learning before expressing themselves, and his ideas about leisure as an essential condition of study. He tells how he was foiled in his perverse little scheme of defending Ignorance, and how much he now welcomes the opportunity to praise what he most loves and desires. Stating his thesis, the defence of learning, he declares that he is embarrassed by a superabundance of material. Then, before plunging into his argument, he reminds his listeners that any objections later brought forward by Ignorance will be borrowed, of course, from Art itself.[89]

The *Oratio* is divided into two parts. The first part is a positive statement of the happiness brought by learning, both to our immortal or spiritual lives and to our mortal or ordinary lives, private and public. The second part is an attack on the notion that art is long and life short, a discussion of the incentive of fame, and a contemptuous dismissal of the ignoble happiness promised by Ignorance. Milton begins, then, with the relevance of learning to our contemplation of the eternal life. God has given us souls, he argues, which are endowed with a yearning for the highest wisdom, and the more we understand the magnificence of creation, the more we glorify God. Learning can exist without virtue, and virtue without learning; but whereas the absence of learning in a people means barbarism (witness Europe during the Middle Ages, taught only by ignorant, superstitious monks), the combination of virtue and learning is a powerful influence for good. 'Even one man, endowed with art and wisdom, may prove to be a great gift of God, sufficient to reform a whole nation.' The human will to virtue is guided by knowledge, which is superior to the will, and learning wedded to morality produces wisdom.[90]

In our ordinary, private lives, 'knowledge is the fairest ornament of youth, the strong defence of manhood, the glory and comfort of old age'. Many have turned to it as a refuge after worldly ambitions have been realized. Its price, Milton concedes, may be the pleasures of casual social intercourse.

> The greatest part of human happiness is usually derived from fellowship and the making of friends, and it is often complained that a majority of learned men are hard to please, lacking in courtesy, eccentric, and without the graciousness that

> wins hearts. I acknowledge that one who is habitually absorbed and withdrawn in study is readier to converse with immortals than with men, either because he associates so much with the gods, having little knowledge and experience of human affairs, or because the mind, enlarged by continual contemplation of divine things and therefore cramped by the narrow confines of the body, becomes less and less expert in the social amenities. But if such a person forms a worthy and congenial friendship, no one cherishes it more sacredly. For what more delightful and happy can be imagined than those conversations of learned and eminent men, such as divine Plato is said to have conducted often under that famous plane tree—conversations which all humanity might well have flocked to hear in attentive silence? On the other hand, stupid chatter and mutual incitement to luxury and licentiousness is but the friendship of ignorance—or, really, the ignorance of friendship.

No form of mortal happiness, Milton urges, can possibly surpass the joy to be found in learning and in art. What a thrilling experience it is

> to comprehend every law of the firmament and its stars, all the motions and changes of the air, whether by fiery comets or the majestic roll of thunder it terrifies untaught minds, or whether it freezes into snow or hail, or falls softly and gently as rain or dew; to understand perfectly the shifting winds and all the vapours and gases which earth and sea exude; then to know the secret powers of plants and minerals, and to know the nature and feelings (if that may be) of all living things; then the delicate structure and medicine of the human body; and, above all, the godlike might and power of the human mind, and any knowledge to be gained about those beings called spirits and genii and daemons. There is an infinitude of subjects more, a goodly part of which could be learned in less time than it would take to name them all. Finally, my hearers, when universal learning shall have completed its cycle, the spirit of man, no longer confined by this dark prisonhouse, will reach out far and wide until it fills the whole world and the space beyond, with a divine expansion of magnitude. Then, at last, many chances and changes of the world will be so quickly perceived that to one who possesses this stronghold of wisdom hardly anything unforeseen or fortuitous can happen. He will seem to be one whose power and dominion the stars will obey, to whom the land and sea will hearken, the winds and tempests defer; one to whom Mother Nature herself will surrender, like some god abdicating power on earth and entrusting its court, laws, and administration to him as governor. Besides all this, what delight it affords the mind to take its flight through the history and problems of every nation, observing, to the profit of wisdom and morality, the changes in the conditions of kingdoms, states, cities, and peoples. This, my hearers, is to live in every epoch, to be as it were coeval with time itself. Indeed, as we have looked into the future for the glory of our name, this will be to extend and stretch our lives backward from the womb—to wrest from Fate a kind of retrospective immortality.

Beyond all these pleasures, Milton concludes, is the ultimate reward of great learning: 'to be the oracle of many nations, to have one's house become a shrine, to be a man whom kings and states invite to come to them, one whom men from far and near flock to see, while some consider it a point of pride if they but set eyes on him once.' Such fruits learning can and often does bestow upon her votaries in private life.[91]

What of public life? Milton disdains to mince words. 'Truly, a reputation for learning has raised but few to the height of majesty, and a reputation for uprightness not many more. Such men enjoy *a kingdom within* which is far more glorious than any earthly dominion' (my italics). Augustus and Alexander the Great are possible exceptions. The Spartans and Romans owed something, but not much, to learning; and the modern Turks enjoy dominion devoid of culture. The Saracens, however, were learned. If one reviews ancient history it is clear that states owe their creation to the development of culture.[92]

Ignorance complains that life is short and art long. The reverse of the proverb will be true, Milton argues, if we but remove two of the chief obstacles to study, human laziness and bad educational methods. It is absurd that we should expend great energy in gaining a mere livelihood, yet shrink from the intellectual labours leading to happiness. Neglect of the mind for the sake of the body is unreasonable; the protection of health, too often an excuse for sheer self-indulgence. A temperate life makes possible intense, productive study. We could save years of our lives, moreover, if we studied only useful subjects, disregarding or curtailing the quibbles in grammar and rhetoric, the bad teaching of logic ('queen of the arts when properly taught'), the quagmire of fallacies which is metaphysics, the monkish corruption of mathematics and natural science. As for the training given lawyers, 'our confused methods make jurisprudence seem especially obscure, and, to make matters worse, our speech is—I know not what—Red Indian, I suppose, or not even human. When I have heard our pettifoggers ranting in this jargon, it has sometimes occurred to me to wonder whether a human mouth and speech belonged to them, or human feelings dwelt in them.' Nevertheless, while Ignorance is encouraged by human laziness and faulty pedagogy, 'if from childhood onward we allow no day to pass without lessons and diligent study, if we are wise enough to eliminate the irrelevant and superfluous and useless from every branch of knowledge, then truly, before we have attained the age of Alexander the Great [who died at thirty-three], we shall have subdued something greater and more glorious than that world of his. So far from complaining that life is short and art tedious, I believe we shall be more likely to weep and wail, as Alexander once did, because there are no more worlds to conquer.'

Ignorance may protest, however, that the world is decaying, that time may soon run out, and that the incentive of fame and glory is gone. This may be, Milton admits; but 'not to value glory when you do well—that is above all glory. How little satisfaction have dead and departed heroes derived from the empty praise of men, seeing that no joy or knowledge of it could reach them! But we may hope for an eternal life, in which the memory of good deeds performed on earth will never perish.' Any happiness promised by Ignorance is a negative thing, a denial of the God-given mind, an existence inferior to that of beasts or stones. Milton's listeners, if they would avoid such a dismal fate, must put Ignorance to flight. He concludes by apologizing for the unconventional length of his speech—the result, he declares solemnly (or was it with a winning smile?), of his great concern for the welfare of his audience.[93]

Milton graduated Master of Arts *cum laude* at the Commencement on 3 July 1632.[94] He was one of twenty-seven Bachelors from Christ's College receiving the degree (his name heading the list in the University Subscription Books), one of 207 from all the colleges. Like the others, he signed the graduation-book in the presence of the Registrar, thereby subscribing (as he had done before, on receiving the B.A. degree) to the three Articles of Religion enjoined in the thirty-sixth of the ecclesiastical canons of 1603–4. This condition of graduation, a routine matter since about 1624, meant acknowledging the liturgy and doctrines of the Church of England, and the royal supremacy in all matters. So far as we have any evidence, Milton was able to make this subscription in perfectly good faith—if, indeed, he and the other candidates thought much about it at the time. Although he had let his twenty-third birthday go by without being admitted a deacon, he was still planning to become a minister within the Church of England.[95] One often waited until age twenty-four, and graduation, before taking Holy Orders. Cambridge M.A.s took a second oath, however, which custom had obviously rendered meaningless: they swore to continue their 'regency' or active university studies for five additional years. Under the original statutes this involved residence and a further course of study in Hebrew and theology, leading, after seven full years, to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. In actual fact no one now remained after the M.A. except those appointed to fellowships or other offices and a few who pursued special studies. Milton prepared, therefore, to bid Cambridge farewell. His plans envisaged a five-year 'regency' of private reading, a rigorous experiment in personal education.

The *Oratio pro Arte* had expressed the key to these plans:

> From books and the words of sages I have learned that, in the orator as in the poet, nothing commonplace or mediocre can be tolerated, and that whoever would be an orator in reality as well as in name must first acquire a thorough background of knowledge in all the arts and sciences. Since at my age this is impossible, I would now rather strive to merit a solid reputation by long and concentrated study and by the preliminary acquisition of that background, than snatch at a false reputation with a hurried and premature style. Daily afire with this plan and purpose, I have felt no more grievous hindrance or delay than the frequent annoyance of these interruptions, while nothing better nourished the development and health of the mind, contrary to what is true of the body, than a learned and liberal leisure.

Milton was confident that he knew the way to accomplish a great deal in a relatively short time: 'If, by living modestly and temperately, we choose to tame the primary impulses of headstrong youth by reason and by steady devotion to study, preserving the divine vigour of our minds pure and uncontaminated by all contagion and pollution, we should be astonished to find, looking back over a period of years, how great a distance we had covered and how wide a sea of knowledge we had peacefully voyaged across.' At the age of twenty-three, with seven years of university work behind him, he confidently set about strengthening his preparation for the important tasks ahead.[96]

Although he had 'never greatly admired' the Cambridge system of education, although he had endured periods of acute loneliness, he left Christ's College with a full knowledge that he had made some devoted friends, that his talents and personal integrity had been appreciated, and that many persons wished him to remain. It is perhaps better to elaborate these significant facts in Milton's own words and in the words of his earliest biographers. It was doubtless his brother Christopher who told Aubrey that Milton 'was a very hard student in the University and performed all his exercises there with very good applause.' The anonymous biographer reported that 'for his diligent study, his performance of public exercises, and for choice verses, written on the occasions usually solemnized by the universities, as well as for his virtuous and sober life, he was in high esteem with the best of his time.' Wood, who rarely concealed his dislike of Milton's personality, declared that the Cambridge student was not 'ignorant of his own parts', but conceded that he 'performed the collegiate and academical exercise to the admiration of all'. Phillips asserted that 'for the extraordinary wit and reading he had shown in his performances to attain his degree . . . he was loved and admired by the whole University, particularly by the Fellows and most ingenious persons of his house.'[97]

Twice in public controversy Milton commented on his Cambridge career, trusting that the simple truth would stop any effective answer. In his *Defensio Secunda* (1654) he stated that he had won the approval of all good men at the University, that he had obtained his M.A. degree with applause, and that the Fellows of his College, having shown their extraordinary regard for him, saw him leave with regret. Earlier, in his *Apology* (1642), he had welcomed 'an apt occasion to acknowledge publicly, with all grateful mind, that more than ordinary favour and respect which I found above any of my equals at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the Fellows of that College wherein I spent some years, who at my parting, after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many ways how much better it would content them that I would stay, as by many letters full of kindness and loving respect both before that time and long after I was assured of their singular good affection towards me.' Milton left

Christ's with a feeling of deep affection for 'those ingenuous and friendly men who were ever the countenancers of virtuous and hopeful wits', and ten years later he wished them publicly 'the best and happiest things that friends in absence wish one to another.'[98]

He had both hated and loved Cambridge. He departed sadly. But he had plans for himself which Cambridge could not further.

# PART TWO

# SELF-EDUCATION

# 4. Hammersmith, 1632–1635

At some time between September 1631 and the following September, Milton's father retired from business, gave up the home and shop in Bread Street, and went to live in Hammersmith, a suburb of London in the Middlesex parish of Fulham.[1] He was approaching seventy. It is reasonable to suppose that the move took place soon after John's graduation from Cambridge on 3 July 1632. Young Christopher withdrew from the University at that time, having spent only five terms there, and on 22 September, at the age of seventeen, he was admitted to the Inner Temple as a law student.[2] John was not attracted by the law, nor was he yet ready to enter the ministry. With his parents' consent, he joined them in their new suburban home, and settled down to study and write.

Hammersmith was a hamlet on the north bank of the Thames, about six or seven miles west of St. Paul's Cathedral. A few miles farther west was Brentford, where Edmund Ironside had fought the Danes in 1016.[3] Nearby was Fulham, in whose parish Hammersmith was included, and the palace of the bishops of London, with its famous gardens and ancient moat. Hammersmith had its own place of worship: the chapel of St. Paul had been consecrated by Bishop Laud on 7 June 1631, as a 'chapel of ease' to Fulham, and its curate (from 13 July 1631) was John Dent.[4] There, too, were Butterwick House, residence of Edmund Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, and 'the Great House' (later Crabtree House), residence of Nicholas Crisp, with whom the Miltons were almost certainly acquainted. Crisp had grown up in Bread Street, and had married Anne Prescott of the All Hallows parish.[5]

Lost on young Milton, absorbed in his books or in the beauty of the Middlesex countryside, were certain interesting synchronisms and events of 1632. He may have known that in April a congregation of Independents had been surprised at Blackfriars, with many arrests following; he could not have known that, later that year, John Locke and Spinoza were born, to bring into the world new concepts of religious toleration. Born also in 1632 were Milton's future biographer, Anthony à Wood (born without the à), and Christopher Wren (Londoners passing St. Paul's during 1632 stopped to watch repairs in progress). During the month of November, Sir John Eliot died in the Tower, Gustavus Adolphus died on the field of battle, and many Englishmen wondered anew at their government's policy toward the international struggle which posterity would name the Thirty Years War.

In 1632 two books were published which Milton must have owned and read with considerable interest. Encouraged by his royal pardon of more than a year before, Alexander Gill collected his occasional Latin verse of the past decade and offered it to the reading public. The little volume is recommended by six poetic tributes from friends—none, however, from Milton, who had been busy with final academic exercises at the time of its publication. Gill's preface is dated 4 June. There are politic verses on Bishop Laud and the birth of the Princess Mary. There are not so politic verses on Tilly and Gustavus Adolphus. Four of the poems are addressed to Gill's friend, John Stonehouse, who died ten days after the preface was written; and several, like those to Sir Paul Pindar and the Earl of Denbigh, are polite bids for favour. Milton must have seen many of these pieces before their publication.

Although Gill's *Poems* appeared without commendatory verses from his most poetic friend, the Second Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, also printed in 1632, contained Milton's tribute—without, however, any indication of authorship. The reason for this anonymity is not clear; modesty was not a Miltonic trait. Perhaps the father frowned on his son's addiction to poetry, considering it a threat to the long-planned ministerial career, now being postponed. In any case, Milton found that his contribution, together with another anonymous piece and one signed 'I.M.S.', had been added to the poems by Ben Jonson, Hugh Holland, and Leonard Digges reprinted from the First Folio. Since Jonson, Holland, and Digges were all still alive, they too must have noticed the additions and wondered about the contributors.

Jonson certainly had Alexander Gill on his mind in the year 1632. Ben's latest play, *The Magnetic Lady*, had proved a greater failure on the boards than its predecessor, *The New Inn*; and Gill, anticipating that its author would publish it in contempt of the public, wrote and circulated some verses on Jonson's 'bed-ridden wit':

O what a strange prodigious year 'twill be
If this thy play come forth in Thirty-Three.
Let doomsday rather come on New Year's Eve!

Doomsday waited, but Ben turned:

Shall the prosperity of a pardon still
Secure thy railing rhymes, infamous Gill,
At libelling? Shall no Star-chamber peers,
Pillory, nor whip, nor want of ears,
All which thou hast incurred deservedly,
Nor degradation from the ministry,

To be the Denis of thy father's school,
Keep in thy bawling wit, thou bawling fool? . . .

One of Jonson's admirers, Zouch Townley, also attacked Gill.[8]

Milton probably heard of this war of words, but he had worries of his own. His seven years of expensive education at the University had been a preparation for the ministry, and the seven years were ended. On 9 December he would celebrate his twenty-fourth birthday—the canonical age for admission to the priesthood.[9] Of the twenty-six other young men of Christ's College who received the Master's degree when he did, at least three had already reached their twenty-fourth birthday and had been ordained as priests. Several others planned to be ordained later in 1632. Most, if not all, of the entire group intended a career in the ministry.[10]

When Milton bade farewell to his classmates and returned home, he had not yet decided against a career in the Church, to which he 'was destined of a child'. If we interpret the facts from his own words, the final decision was made only after he had come 'to some maturity of years'.[11] This was his significant way of dating the decision when he mentioned it afterwards; and at twenty-four he considered himself still a 'youth' and only arrived 'near' manhood. He felt that he was lacking in the 'inward ripeness', the intellectual and spiritual maturity, necessary to an effective ministry. So he confessed in his seventh sonnet. But in addition he was grievously (and permanently) disappointed in his Cambridge education, anxious to learn more about the subjects neglected or not taught there at all. There was no reason to precipitate one's self into a pulpit; the reasonable thing was to be ready when the time came.

Although the inference is tempting, it is impossible to say, now, whether or not Milton's interest in composing poetry influenced his decision to postpone taking Holy Orders. By 1632 he certainly knew himself to be a poet, and certainly intended to continue writing verse. He was aware, too, as the Seventh Prolusion makes clear, of the poet's need for 'thorough knowledge'. But there was nothing incompatible in a dedicated ministry joined to dedicated art. John Donne, who had died the year before as Dean of St. Paul's, had been both poet and preacher; so had Giles Fletcher. Still alive were Phineas Fletcher and George Herbert, the pious rector of Bemerton, who had once been Public Orator at Cambridge. Milton may not have known about Robert Herrick, fashioning filigree verses at far-away Dean Prior, but there were plenty of examples well known to him of ordained ministers who were also poets. There was no essential conflict in the two careers, such as posterity might imagine.

On the other hand, in his closing years at Cambridge Milton had felt the attraction of secular verse in the Jonsonian or Cavalier manner, and, although there is no direct evidence, it may be that he had toyed with the notion of finding a noble patron, in the accepted way of his age, and becoming exclusively a man of letters. If he had any such thoughts at the beginning of the Hammersmith period, he probably did not mention them to his father. Milton senior was a man of some cultivation; he, too, had artistic tastes, especially in music; but he had financed his son's education thus far on the understanding that the boy would enter the Church. A man nearing seventy is not likely to give up, without an emotional crisis, an idea he has cherished for twenty-three long years. The *postponement* of young John's ordination did not, perhaps, disturb him; he could sympathize with his son's passion for adequate preparation, and John had given ample evidence of serious purpose. But the old scrivener had made an investment, and he expected eventually the return of his principal.

The Hammersmith period of literary retirement and studious leisure was not, for the seventeenth century, a strange interlude. Many young men remained at their university after receiving their degrees;[12] others took up residence for a time at one of the Inns of Court, with or without the pretence of studying law. These were pleasant and familiar practices among those who could afford the luxury, and Milton's sojourn at his father's suburban home differed only in its comparative isolation and its intense purposefulness. Among his friends, however, was at least one who thought the Hammersmith period a sinful waste of time, and said so.

During 1633 Milton met this friend (clearly an older person)[13] and had a brief conversation with him. The young man was rebuked for his failure to enter the ministry at once. He was dreaming away his years in the arms of studious retirement, and the day was at hand wherein Christ commands all to labour while there is light. 'Too much love of learning' was 'in fault'. He should be preaching, not yielding to the endless delight of speculation. Such 'tardy moving' the friend could not understand.

Milton evidently did a poor job of explaining himself, for the next day he felt impelled to write a long letter making his position clear. This 'Letter to an Unknown Friend' is extant in two drafts, and it tells us much about Milton's determination to prepare himself thoroughly. It says nothing about poetic ambitions, and it implies throughout that the writer will eventually become a clergyman. Near the close Milton realizes that he is almost sermonizing and declares that, if he goes on, he will 'do that which I excuse myself for not doing: preach and not preach'. He concludes in the same half-humorous vein: 'Having thus tired you singly, I should deal worse with a whole congregation, and spoil the patience of a parish.' The letter is not an apology for giving up the ministry; it is an apology for what has seemed to a good friend procrastination.[14]

Milton fully intends a 'due and timely obedience' to the biblical command to use one's talents; yet he means 'not to press forward as soon as may be to undergo', but rather to wait 'with a sacred reverence and religious advisement how *best* to undergo'. He is worrying, not about 'being late', but about being 'more fit'. The letter is very respectful; it thanks the friend for good counsel; but Milton firmly trusts that his own conscience 'is not without God'. To be sure, his life is yet 'unserviceable to mankind', and he is aware of both the 'expectations and murmurs of friends'. Nevertheless, 'a mere love of learning',[15] he points out, 'could not have held out thus long' against such potent forces as the inclination 'which about this time of a man's life solicits most, the desire of house and family of his own', and the 'desire of honour and repute and immortal fame seated in the breast of every true scholar'. These, he argues, would have already driven him 'to that which you wish me', had there not been urgent need for more preparation.

Even before the conversation with his friend, Milton had, of course, worried about the 'belatedness' in himself; indeed, he had expressed his feelings in a sonnet—his first, apparently, since the love poems to Emilia. Having spoken of this sonnet the day before, he enclosed it in the letter.[16] A birthday had made him uncomfortably aware of the passage of time:

> How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Knowing that Milton later became a great poet, we incline today to interpret 'bud or blossom' as meaning poetic achievement, and so Milton, as an artist sensitive to words, may have partly intended. But no more than partly. The sonnet as a whole is not about anything so specific as the writing of poetry; as the letter explains, it is about 'a certain belatedness' in Milton's *development* as a person, about 'this my tardy moving' in the service of God. If Milton so early conceived of that service in terms of poetry, it was a mental reservation, and we should not force it into his lines, making his complaint, in effect, a kind of paradox. The 'bud or blossom' is adequately explained in the next quatrain of the sonnet itself. By the blossom of his late spring he meant some external evidence of maturity, and even his appearance did not show his age:

> Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
> That I to manhood am arrived so near . . .

By 'bud', on the other hand, he intended some less outward and visible indication of intellectual and spiritual development:

> And inward ripeness doth much less appear
> That some more timely-happy spirits endueth.

The words 'much less appear' tell us that he worried far more about this than about his youthful appearance. The 'timely-happy spirits' are, of course, those fortunate persons whose development keeps pace with their advancing years.

In the sestet of the sonnet Milton reassures himself, as he does in the letter, by 'not taking thought of being late so it give advantage to be more fit'. Whether his 'inward ripeness' come late or soon, whether it be less or more than the 'timely-happy spirits' possess, it will come when God intends and will be adequate to the work God means him to do:

> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which time leads me—and the will of Heaven.
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

These lines express, not only a sense of humble submission, but also the surety of God's eventual use of him.[17] All he must really worry about is the readiness, the 'grace to use it so'. If his 'late spring' is here, can summer be far behind?

Milton does not express or imply an opinion about 'that same lot' toward which the will of Heaven leads him. Indeed, at this uncertain and disappointing stage in his development he may have lacked any clear and definite notions about his future labours. On the other hand, he knows beyond doubt that his life will be devoted—as his father and he had always intended—to the service of God. The sonnet is one of re-dedication, made near the outset of a new and arduous period of preparing himself. The Hammersmith days began solemnly, in a deeply religious spirit. The light-hearted verse of his last years at Cambridge was behind him now, in another world.

In 1633 Samuel Pepys and James II of England were born; George Herbert and William Ames died. George Abbot died, and in August William Laud became the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Milton spent the year for the most part in study. Occasionally he rode to London to learn something new in mathematics or in music.[18] Sometimes he returned with volumes for his growing library. On 21 October 1633 he purchased the *Collectanea* of John Creccelius.[19] In 1634 he bought editions of Euripides and Lycophron.[20] On these visits to booksellers he may or may not have noticed the newest additions to English poetry: *Poetical Blossoms* by a youngster named Cowley; *The Temple* of Herbert; *Poems* by Dr. Donne; two books by Phineas Fletcher. Almost certainly, however, he heard of the notorious *Histriomastix*, a long and violent attack upon masques and plays. The book had greatly offended the King and Queen, and its author, William Prynne, was imprisoned in the Tower, awaiting further punishment by the Star Chamber.[21]

That Milton had little sympathy with the severely puritanical views of Prynne is evident from a major interruption which he permitted in the Hammersmith studies. He accepted the invitation of the Egerton family (extended perhaps through Henry Lawes)[22] to compose for them a full-length masque, to be performed upon a very special occasion.

In June 1631 the King had nominated the Earl of Bridgewater to be

Lord President of Wales, a viceregal post of power and prestige. The appointment had been confirmed and full instructions given in a royal letter of 12 May 1633.[23] These instructions were forwarded by the Earl to his official seat, Ludlow Castle in Shropshire, some time in October; and shortly afterwards he followed in person. His family planned to join him during the next year, and some of them decided to celebrate the reunion with a masque like those given at Court. In 1634 the young Egertons were particularly enthusiastic about masques. Lady Alice had sung and danced in Aurelian Townshend's *Tempe Restored*, and, more recently, on 18 February 1634 her two brothers had danced in Thomas Carew's *Cœlum Britanicum*.[24] What more delightful than to have a masque of their own, honouring their father?

Milton must have realized, when he was invited to compose a full evening's entertainment, that the Egerton family could easily have commanded the service of such well-known poets as Carew or Shirley or Townshend. Even Ben Jonson, who had not been asked to do a Court masque for three years, would have welcomed such an invitation. It was a request most flattering to a young and unknown writer. As an artist he must have been excited, too, by the challenge of a new form and the necessity for a piece of writing longer than anything he had hitherto attempted. Unfortunately, the amount of time spent on the masque would be time stolen from his studies. What did his father think? Even if the old scrivener failed to agree with Prynne and other Puritans that masques were 'heathenish practices', they were nevertheless an irrelevant interruption of young John's avowed purposes. Certainly they had nothing to do with preparation for the ministry! And certainly John did not need the patronage of an aristocratic family! If the father, hitherto so indulgent and understanding, expressed any such misgivings as these, a crisis in their relationship was inevitable with the composition of a full-length masque.

That a crisis occurred we seem to be told by Milton's Virgilian *Ad Patrem*.[25] To read this Latin poem merely as a tribute to his father, with little or no attention to the conflict that inspired it, is to overlook one of the crucial moments in Milton's development.

A conflict is explicitly stated in *Ad Patrem*; it is not implied or suggested; no reading between lines is necessary. Milton did not write *Ad Patrem* simply because he felt like praising his father. He did not write it because he was finally bursting with gratitude for favours past. The poem is an argument, carefully developed, tactfully phrased, shrewdly climaxed with a flattering promise. It is a smiling, urbane attempt to persuade an old man to change his mind. The retired scrivener had expressed himself as 'despising' poetry (line 17). He held it in 'contempt', counting it 'futile and useless' (56–57). He 'hated' it (67). Milton records his father's attitude bluntly.

What he does not tell us, what he leaves to our speculation, is the *cause* of this evidently sudden opposition. The poem nowhere states or suggests, nor is there elsewhere any evidence, that the father's dislike of poetry had been expressed before or was of long standing. On the contrary, Milton argues that his whole careful education, and his father's agreement to the Hammersmith period of additional study, had been, in effect, an endorsement of literary activity. Something, therefore, had happened to arouse the old man's antagonism to the Muses. Can we doubt that it was the composition of the masque? There is one fact in the poet's biography which puts the matter almost beyond question—a fact truly inexplicable if the conflict expressed in *Ad Patrem* does not apply to *Comus*. The masque was written in 1634; and during 1635, 1636, and the first ten months of 1637 Milton *wrote no more poetry*. Instead he was studying, at his father's expense—at his father's wish.

In *Ad Patrem*, as in the 1633 letter to an unknown friend, Milton's future career as a clergyman is assumed throughout. The matter is not mentioned because it is taken for granted between the poet and his father, and the poem is not at all concerned with it. Indeed, the poem is not a plea that Milton be allowed to undertake a career as a poet; he speaks, instead, of his youthful verses as his amusement and pastime (line 115), and concedes that they have been trivial (4). He asks only that his father should not despise and condemn this pleasant avocation. *Ad Patrem* is an argument that poetry is congenial to Milton's (unstated) life work, and he cleverly thanks his parent for not forcing him into business or law, where poetry would be uncongenial. It is clearly implied that the father thinks he is preparing his son for *something*—and obviously not for poetry.

The force and effectiveness of Milton's argument are apparent only upon close examination. *Ad Patrem* begins with the hope that his Muse can rise to appropriate heights, her trifling verse forgotten, to do honour to his father. He is not at all certain that his father will like a poetic tribute, but he suggests that it is an appropriate return, however inadequate, for paternal gifts. He has yet no money of his own; he has no resources, in fact, except the knowledge which can be noted in words. His wealth is the knowledge of history which he has acquired at Hammersmith (thanks to his father), and the power of poetry.[26] With these, then, he must try to repay greater gifts.

His father should not despise poetry, which more than anything else is evidence of man's divine origin and God-given intelligence. In the spirit of Latin verse, Milton adduces ancient story to prove that 'the gods love song' and that poetry has long been connected with religion. Then, speaking of the Christian heaven (*patrium Olympum*, 30), he reminds his father of St. John's account in Revelation of the songs about the eternal throne. Even secular verse is not to be despised, for in the Golden Age the epic poet graced the tables of kings, singing the emulable deeds of heroes and the creation of the world. Milton's father must agree that songs 'without words and meaning and eloquent rhythm' are only for birds—not for human beings. Poetry and music have long been allied, and Milton senior—of all people—should not consider verses vain and poor, for he has put many songs to music. Father and son, they pursue kindred arts and interests. The musician cannot think it strange that his offspring was born a poet!

Milton refuses to believe that his father really hates the Muses. For example, when the scrivener retired from his lucrative business, he did not expect his eldest son to succeed him; nor did he force John to join Christopher at the Inns of Court in the study of law. Instead, wishing John to be even better educated, he permitted him this period of studious retirement and pleasant leisure, with opportunities for poetic composition. It was the father, moreover, who had urged, and paid for, extensive training in languages, and was even now making possible some knowledge of science. Let others go and gather riches; Milton has been blessed with more precious gifts. Even God could give no better, except the gift of Heaven itself. However humble his present place in the company of learned men, Milton will eventually be distinguished from the dull rabble, armed against envy and calumny. This is his destiny, and this has been his father's doing. He acknowledges it all with profound gratitude.

The closing lines of the poem bring the height of the small argument, and provide the deftest touch. Since he is designed for greatness, even his youthful verses, even his pastimes, may hope for immortality; and among them, now, is this eulogy of his father. Distant ages will know his thankfulness, and will honour the name of John Milton senior.[27] This glowing promise was conventional and modestly Horatian; it was also exceedingly tactful and astute. But three centuries and more later, in one of those distant ages, we are likely to read it without a smile. Still,

> Prophecy made with present gain in view
> Is more amusing if remotely true.

Did Milton's father read it with a smile?

We do not know how the aged scrivener responded to the argument of *Ad Patrem*. He was still alive when, eventually, it was published. It seems safe to assume that he had never really objected to poetry *per se*, but rather to worldly verse which was an obvious interruption of his son's preparation for the ministry. He had possibly suggested Milton's Psalm paraphrases himself. Looking back over the young man's writing, we may feel confident that the father never 'despised' such poems as the recent sonnet on a birthday, *At a Solemn Music*, *Upon the Circumcision*, *On Time*, *The Passion*, the *Nativity Ode*, the *Fair Infant Elegy*, and *In Quintum Novembris*. These were pious exercises appropriate to a young clergyman. But a masque, a theatrical entertainment with dancing, to be performed publicly before an aristocratic audience—how could this be reconciled with the son's professed purposes?

The Miltons were a stubborn breed. The poet's father had been disinherited by his own parent because of religious conviction. He was now in his seventy-second year. Was family history to repeat itself? It was not. Perhaps mutual affection and confidence prevailed; perhaps *Ad Patrem* was persuasive. In any case, as so often happens in family quarrels, this one seems to have ended in certain compromises. In any case, the young poet worked hard, during the late spring and early summer of 1634,[28] on his masque of Comus and the Lady.

Literary historians like to insist that we consider *Comus*,[29] not as another poem, but as a masque. Then, setting us an example, they may conclude that it is deficient, a poor specimen of its kind, indeed something of a sport;[30] or, if they be idolatrous as well as historical in attitude, they regard it as Milton's profoundly original contribution to the masque tradition. Neither of these judgements is warranted by the facts. Instead, we must try to understand exactly what Milton was attempting to do, faced with certain inflexible conditions; and we must remember that the masque as a literary form was fluid, not fixed, in the year 1634, and that Jonson himself had been eclipsed by rapidly changing fashions. Then, and only then, can we judge the success or failure of Milton's endeavour. Literary history can be a misleading guide to *Comus*, for it supplies us with models and patterns and ordered conclusions which were not only inaccessible to the writer whom we are studying, but also irrelevant to the expectations of his audience.

In several ways *Comus* is unique among Milton's poems. It is his only masque, of course.[31] But nothing else that he ever wrote was so thoroughly influenced by the wishes of others and by external circumstances. It was limited from the outset by certain practical considerations utterly beyond his control. He was not composing a masque because he happened to feel like it; he was complying with a specific request, trying to cope with a specific situation, and probably working under specific supervision. It may be that he read some other English masques, like Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Vertue*; there were several dozen he could have studied in print before composing his own. But it is even more reasonable to suppose that he deferred to the judgement and experience of Henry Lawes on every doubtful point. To look at it another way, it is inconceivable that Lawes, with his mature ideas and practical knowledge of masques, would have left a cloistered youth of twenty-five entirely to his own devices. Modern criticism has grown increasingly fond of interpreting Milton's character development in terms of *Comus*, whereas the didactic element in the entertainment may not have been Milton's idea in the first place. Its expression was, of course; its elaboration may have been strongly influenced by parental criticism of the whole attempt and Prynne's *Histrio-*

*mastix*; but both expression and elaboration, we should remember, had passed a critical eye more accustomed to the masque tradition than our own.

The whole point and purpose of *Comus* was to honour and entertain the new Lord President of Wales and his assembled guests, and to give three of his children an opportunity to 'act'. Ludlow Castle was near the Welsh border,[32] and its remoteness from London had much to do with the nature of the masque. Certain elements common to the great court masques were simply impossible of inclusion in Milton's poem. Spectacle was one.[33] Unlike Ben Jonson, the younger poet did not have to compose verse to compete with the elaborate scenery, the complicated and astonishing apparatus which Inigo Jones was inventing to dazzle the eyes of London audiences. On the contrary, Milton's poetry (like Shakespeare's for the stage) had to bear the burden of description and compensate, somehow, for the dearth of visual aids to the imagination. There are three 'scenes' in *Comus*, none of them demanding the furniture, back-drops, sets, machinery, carpenters, scene-shifters, and trained stagehands necessary to a Whitehall production. The 'wild wood' of the opening action was doubtless suggested with shrubbery and other simple effects—with the rest left to the poet. The 'stately palace' of the second scene, with its 'tables spread with all dainties', was simply the hall in Ludlow Castle prepared for an evening's festivities. The third and final scene, then, was Ludlow Castle itself, with the actual town as a background. *Comus* was a masque written, by necessity, without benefit of spectacle. It is therefore not at all surprising that it breathes more of the outdoors than the usual court performances, with their stale air and strong suggestion of torchlight and ballrooms. The 'atmosphere' of Milton's entertainment was born of practical concerns; it tells us little or nothing of his preferences or inclinations.

The remoteness of Ludlow determined another and even more radical departure from the masque tradition, about which the poet had no choice. It was surely not feasible to transport a large number of trained dancers and singers from London to Shropshire. A masque without dancing was unthinkable; but the bottomless difficulty of rehearsing a great many Ludlow people in complicated measures—a difficulty which Lawes, not Milton, had to face—probably seemed too much to cope with. There would be country dancers in Shropshire, however, and these could be used for one 'anti-masque'. But the central moment of the fashionable court productions, the presentation of the noble masquers, who then danced elaborate steps—this would have to be eliminated. As a concession to the spirit of the masque, there could be general dancing near the end of the performance, but probably nothing intricate, perhaps nothing rehearsed.

The country dancers might earlier be used for an additional anti-masque, disguised as monsters and wearing animal heads left over from the recent *Cœlum Britanicum*, in which two of the Egerton boys had performed.[34] But nothing more than this was feasible. Lawes was no dancing-master. Milton would have to write a masque in which, for once, the *poetry* would be interesting and delightful in its own right, and not merely serve as incidental adornment and an introduction to the dance. He would have to write a masque in which, for once, the slight dramatic action, and not the revels, was the important event of the evening. It was a hard assignment.

The assignment was made more difficult by the obvious limitations of those who were to act in the poem. Milton did not write a masque and then cast it; he started with six persons who intended to perform, and he wrote a piece to suit them. Most important of the *dramatis personae* were fifteen-year-old Lady Alice Egerton and her two brothers, aged eleven and nine.[35] These had to have prominent roles, and yet speeches had to be written for them which they were capable of memorizing. Only Lady Alice, who was Lawes's pupil, could be trusted to sing; the boys' voices were evidently still untrained. Lady Alice perhaps demanded grown-up speeches; at fifteen she was of marriageable age. Lawes himself naturally intended to take part, both as actor and singer; and his mature performance (he was thirty-eight) would have to suggest the choruses and soloists of the court masque. A plot had to be constructed for these four persons, and for two others whose identity has been lost—'Comus' and 'Sabrina'.[36] The plot may not have been of Milton's choosing at all, but may have been requested of him by Lawes or by one of the Egertons, who could have encountered its main elements in Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*.[37] In any case, the poet was hardly in a position to refuse such a request if it was made.

Because of circumstances over which Milton had no control, *Comus* is more like a play than are the other masques of its time.[38] Its plot, however flimsy, devoid of suspense, and lacking in dramatic unity,[39] is more important and essential to its value as entertainment than are its few songs and dances. Its anti-masques seem to be brief and simple, and it contains no true masquers at all. To damn the author for these departures from the norm would be unfair; we must not assume that they resulted from either ignorance or originality. They resulted from necessity. We are not bound to admire them, but we have a certain obligation to understand them.

A little understanding goes a long way toward dispelling some of the attacks which have been levelled at *Comus*. To the modern reader perhaps, viewing the masque in the vacuum of a study, 'the essential moment is not the presentation of the young people to their parents, but it is the steadfast refusal of the Lady to partake of the enchanted cup.'[40] But where are our imaginations? At Ludlow Castle in Shropshire, on the night of Monday, 29 September 1634, with the Earl of Bridgewater beaming with paternal pride, and all his assembled guests beaming too—what was the essential moment? Was it a part of a simple plot whose outcome was predetermined? Or did it come when Lawes stepped forward with the three children of the Earl, singing?—

> Noble lord, and lady bright,
> I have brought ye new delight;
> Here behold so goodly grown
> Three fair branches of your own.
> Heaven hath timely tried their youth,
> Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
> And sent them here through hard assays
> With a crown of deathless praise,
> To triumph in victorious dance
> O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

At this point, we must realize, the Earl and his lady arose from their seats of state, praised their excited children for the triumph of 'acting', and then led their guests in appropriate dances.

In the artificial light of literary history it is unquestionably true that 'the masque is a dramatised dance, *Comus* is a dramatised debate.'[41] But what else could it have been? It is interesting to speculate on what kind of a masterpiece William Shakespeare would have produced in Milton's predicament. Would the speeches have been shorter, the characterizations more subtle, the action more dramatic, the plot more complicated? And, if so, would the Egerton youngsters have risen to the increased demands upon their slender talents? Milton and Lawes knew better what they were doing than some modern criticism has been willing to concede.

One other, important point. Literary history has admitted that other masques besides *Comus* are didactic, and that the personification of a virtue as a central figure is common. This is not surprising when one reflects that, from the beginning, the masque had various affinities with the old morality plays. Nevertheless, criticism has repeatedly expressed uneasiness over the quality and the quantity of didacticism in Milton's poem. The lofty strain of moralizing, we are told, is inappropriate, obtrusive, hampering to the story, alien to the true genius of the masque, whose presiding deity was Hymen. This, of course, is not a single indictment but a series of indictments, proceeding from different points of view. If one has read no other masques, the moralizing in *Comus* will certainly seem inappropriate (as it would be in any good play since the days of Sophocles). If one feels no delight in the contemplation of virtue, if one is merely bored by the eternal conflict of good and evil, the moralizing in Milton's masque will also seem obtrusive. As for the story, it is hampered by its necessary simplicity and necessary length, not by the moralizing. The poetry, whether presenting vice or praising virtue, gives body to the thin bones of plot, enabling them to walk slowly forward and not collapse in a dry clatter. Remove the moralizing from *Comus*, and what happens to an evening's entertainment?

But what of the virtue which Milton chose to praise? What of chastity?[42] Was this a sour note in the symphony of masques, with all their gay and festive associations? Did Milton (and Lawes) fail to realize that the masque 'was a most unsuitable vehicle' for the unfolding of the 'sage and serious doctrine of virginity'?[43] Were the Earl of Bridgewater and his guests aware, as modern criticism is aware, of 'a subtle incongruity' in the performance? Was Milton (with Lawes unable or unwilling to stop him) forcing upon the masque form a series of purely autobiographical reflections? Was he revealing, as Saurat thought, his deep personal 'need to triumph over sensuality'? Did the strength of his own passion, as Hanford thought, cause him to seize upon chastity 'as the centre and test of his ethical idealism'?[44]

The best way to answer all these questions is to ask another. With the heroine of *Comus* fifteen-year-old Lady Alice, the only unmarried daughter of the Earl of Bridgewater, what other virtue should Milton and Lawes have chosen to celebrate?[45] Surely they could have selected none more appropriate, or none better calculated to please the young lady's parents and friends. To argue whether or not the choice was alien to the 'genius' of the masque tradition becomes, therefore, academic. It is unimportant even to notice that the same virtue had been praised by Plato and Spenser and Fletcher, or in other masques. What is really important is the fact that *Comus* was a children's entertainment, requested by children and acted by children, with admiring elders more as spectators than participants. *Comus* was never once intended to be a part of the adult masque tradition. It is instead a lovely offspring, with a 'genius' of its own. It is imitative, as children are imitative; but when the realities of the adult world are plainly beyond reach, it is charmingly original, as all resourceful children are original.

Let us stop, therefore, comparing *Comus* with other masques[46] and, instead, speak more of Milton's craftsmanship and ingenuity in dealing with unusual difficulties. The necessities of the situation placed a heavy burden upon the poetry of *Comus*, as poetry. Lacking masquers, and eye-filling spectacle, and trained actors, and choral singing, Milton had to delight his auditors chiefly with the magic of words. Apart from the children, a few songs set to music by Lawes, and a simple plot, the success of *Comus* as entertainment depended upon language charged with power and beauty, depended upon eloquence and fervour and lyric flights. Milton faced this challenge alone; Lawes could not help him, nor could any knowledge of earlier masques. The poet had to draw upon his reading, his experience, his technical skill, his imagination, and the hidden wealth of his spirit. *Comus* is rich with all of these. As one critic has put it, 'the unique personality of Milton is stamped upon the whole composition and the accent of his poetic idiom is heard everywhere.'[47]

With the poem before us, we can imagine ourselves at the new residence of the Earl of Bridgewater—

Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wishèd presence—and beside,
All the swains that there abide,
With jigs and rural dance resort.
We shall catch them at their sport.

But we must not imagine that, reading a modern text of *Comus*, we are hearing exactly what the new Lord President of Wales and his honoured guests heard on the night of 29 September 1634. The two surviving manuscript versions of *Comus* differ greatly; and the three printed versions which appeared during Milton's lifetime differ from the manuscript texts and from each other. The manuscript still in possession of the Egerton family, known as the Bridgewater or Ellesmere Manuscript, may or may not have been the actual stage copy; but its many cuts (it has 908 lines instead of 1,023) serve to remind us that the audience heard a version shorter than the text which we commonly read—and probably a version, as with the Bridgewater Manuscript, in which some of the lengthy discussions of chastity were lacking.[48]

In the printed versions the masque begins with Henry Lawes, as an attendant Spirit dressed in rainbow-coloured 'sky robes', speaking[49] Milton's first attempt at blank verse:

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aërial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and sèrene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confined, and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
Unmindful of the crown that virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthronèd gods on sainted seats. (1–11)

Here are eleven lines of impelling music without a stop, but perfectly adapted to the spoken voice. The poet succeeds in clothing his fancy in fit sound, from the contrasting vowels of 'In regions mild of calm and sèrene air' and 'Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot', to the appropriate alliteration of 'pestered in this pinfold' and 'frail and feverish'. Again, as in *On Time* and *At a Solemn Music*, he recalls the apocalyptic vision of virtuous souls about the heavenly throne; and again, as in the *Vacation Exercise*, his deep transported mind soars through 'regions of wide air' to look in upon Jove's court. Writing now in blank verse, he uses words with even greater awareness of their tonal qualities.

The Spirit next explains his mission from 'the palace of eternity'. He comes to aid the virtuous; but first he pays fitting tribute to 'this Isle, / The greatest and the best of all the main', and to the new President of Wales and western England:

> And all this tract that fronts the falling sun
> A noble peer, of mickle trust and power,
> Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
> An old and haughty nation proud in arms,
> Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,
> Are coming to attend their father's state
> And new-entrusted sceptre . . . (30–36)

This is the whimsical pretence upon which the plot of *Comus* rests: the three children are coming from their home in (or near) London to join their father at far-away Ludlow. The masque presents their fictitious but edifying 'adventure' en route. The Spirit explains that their way lies through a dangerous (and symbolic) wood, in which their 'tender age' may suffer peril.

> And listen why, for I will tell you now
> What never yet was heard in tale or song
> From old or modern bard in hall or bower. (43–45)

Thus self-consciously, Milton describes and gives the lineage of his own contribution to mythology: Comus ('revelry'),[50] son of Circe and Bacchus, 'Much like his father, but his mother more'. Indeed, Comus 'excels his mother at her mighty art', although he does not, like Circe, change men entirely into beasts:

> Soon as the potion works, their human countenance,
> The express resemblance of the gods, is changed
> Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
> Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
> All other parts remaining as they were . . . (68–72)

To protect the children from such a fate, the Spirit promises to disguise himself

> And take the weeds and likeness of a swain
> That to the service of this house belongs,
> Who with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song
> Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar
> And hush the waving woods . . . (84–88)

In other words, he will become Henry Lawes ('Thyrsis'), whom Milton thus causes to praise his own musical abilities.

Hearing 'the tread of hateful steps',[51] the Spirit disappears, and Comus enters with his rout of monsters, who 'come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.' These men and women, wearing animal heads, 'their apparel glistering', are probably the country dancers of Ludlow—the 'swains that there abide'—who will appear later in their own persons. For the present they gather about Comus, who has a charming rod in one hand, a glass of liquor in the other, and he speaks in the tripping octosyllabic couplets of *L'Allegro*:

> Meanwhile welcome, joy and feast,
> Midnight shout and revelry,
> Tipsy dance and jollity.
> Braid your locks with rosy twine
> Dropping odours, dropping wine.
> Rigour now is gone to bed,
> And Advice with scrupulous head,
> Strict Age, and sour Severity,
> With their grave saws in slumber lie.
> We that are of purer fire
> Imitate the starry choir,
> Who in their nightly watchful spheres
> Lead in swift round the months and years. (102–14)

After fifty lines of this word-magic, Comus invites his followers to begin the first anti-masque, a grotesque dance:

> Come, knit hands, and beat the ground
> In a light fantastic round. (143–4)

Eventually their wild and wanton 'measure' is interrupted by Comus, who, hearing some 'chaste footing', dismisses the monsters and then informs the audience of his dishonourable intentions:

> I under fair pretence of friendly ends,
> And well-placed words of glozing courtesy
> Baited with reasons not unplausible,
> Wind me into the easy-hearted man
> And hug him into snares. (160–4)

Devilishly, he steps aside to eavesdrop (actually to change his costume to that of 'some harmless villager').

Lady Alice enters—doubtless with much applause from the audience. She is lost in the blind mazes of this tangled wood, and, having heard the noises made by Comus and his antic *Comazontes*, she fears an unpleasant encounter with some village inebriates. Her speech begins:

> This way the noise was if mine ear be true,
> My best guide now; methought it was the sound
> Of riot, and ill-managed merriment,
> Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
> Stirs up among the loose, unlettered hinds,
> When for their teeming flocks and granges full
> In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
> And thank the gods amiss. I should be loath
> To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence
> Of such late wassailers.[52] (170–9)

She then explains how she became separated from her brothers. Milton also wrote for her some thirty lines which were omitted from the Bridgewater Manuscript and probably from the performance, among them:

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion conscience.
O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,
And thou unblemished form of Chastity![53]
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glistering guardian if need were
To keep my life and honour unassailed. (210–20)

Lady Alice, hoping that her brothers are within earshot, sings a little song (in which she had been carefully rehearsed by Henry Lawes)[54] to attract their attention:

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph that livest unseen
  Within thy airy shell
  By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale
  Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well.
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
  That likest thy Narcissus are?
  O if thou have
  Hid them in some flowery cave,
  Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere,
So mayest thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all heaven's harmonies.
(230–43)

At the close of this, her only song, we may be sure the audience applauded warmly. In it Milton returns again to the mood of *At a Solemn Music*, with its 'Sphere-born harmonious sisters' and 'celestial consort'. There is even an alexandrine to remind us, together with irregular rimes introducing couplets.

Comus is much affected by the song, and his comment in blank verse has a lyric strain:

Can any mortal mixture of earth's mold
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence.
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence through the empty-vaulted night,

At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness till it smiled . . .

Lorenzo to Jessica, Romeo to Juliet, had no more musical speeches:

I'll speak to her,
And she shall be my queen. . . . (264–5)

The ensuing dialogue between Comus and the Lady is brief and brisk (reminiscent of Greek *stichomythia*); the Lady, of course, is deceived by the 'well-placed words of glozing courtesy'. Before they leave the stage to seek the brothers, the Lady makes amends for her earlier reference to 'loose unlettered hinds', with a gracious compliment to her father's more humble followers at Ludlow:

Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls
And courts of princes . . . (321–5)

Now the two brothers enter—also with much applause from the audience. Eleven-year-old John Egerton, Viscount Brackley and the Earl of Bridgewater's heir, begins the dialogue with a noble speech:

Unmuffle, ye faint stars, and thou, fair moon,
That wontest to love the traveler's benison,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud
And disinherit chaos, that reigns here
In double night of darkness and of shades. (331–5)

Nine-year-old Thomas is, however, more worried about his sister's safety than their own plight, and the elder brother reassures him with great confidence:

Virtue could see to do what virtue would
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk. And wisdom's self
Oft seeks to sweet retirèd solitude,
Where with her best nurse, contemplation,
She plumes her feathers and lets grow her wings
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impaired. (373–80)

The younger brother concedes the security of Il Penseroso—

'Tis most true
That musing meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,
And sits as safe as in a senate house (385–9)

—but he sensibly protests that their beautiful sister is no hermit, and faces danger. This is the elder brother's cue to introduce the slight theme of the masque:

My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine; she has a hidden strength
Which you remember not. . . .
'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity.
She that has that, is clad in complete steel . . . (414–21)

There is some elaboration of this idea of supernatural power, which prompts the younger brother to exclaim (one must imagine the audience listening):

How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets
Where no crude surfeit reigns. (476–80)

At this point they hear someone approaching, and Milton gives the boys speeches probably more to their liking. The nine-year-old pipes manfully: 'Best draw, and stand upon our guard!' Out flash the swords, and as the attendant Spirit (dressed as a shepherd) enters, the elder brother threatens: 'Come not too near! You fall on iron stakes else!' But it is only Henry Lawes, their 'father's shepherd',

Whose artful strains have oft delayed
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
And sweetened every musk rose of the dale . . . (494–6)

They drop for a moment into riming couplets, as Lawes inquires about the Lady. Then, in blank verse again, he tells them at some length about Comus the sorcerer. The younger brother is once more frightened, and John Egerton calms him with a speech very grown-up indeed:

This I hold firm:
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt;
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled.
Yea, even that which mischief meant most harm
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
But evil on itself shall back recoil,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gathered like scum and settled to itself,
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble. (588–99)

Raising his sword, he continues, with brave words (which doubtless filled his father's heart with pride):

But come, let's on!
Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven
May never this just sword be lifted up;
But for that damned magician, let him be girt
With all the grisly legions that troop
Under the sooty flag of Acheron,
Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out
And force him to return his purchase back,
Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
Cursed as his life. (599–609)

Thus, armed with courage—and with haemony[55] 'of divine effect' against magic—they go off to seek the enchanter.

Now, 'the scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties.' After a musical interlude, Comus, attended now by his rabble, enters with the Lady, seats her in an enchanted chair, and tries to tempt her to drink from his glass. The dialogue which follows is much cut in both manuscript versions and was probably cut in the actual performance. For example, missing in the Bridgewater Manuscript is this speech by Comus, which may have been considered unsuitable for the ears of Lady Alice:

List, Lady, be not coy, and be not cozened
With that same vaunted name, virginity.
Beauty is Nature's coin, must not be hoarded,
But must be current, and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself.
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head. (737–44)

Comus talks at length about Nature's fecundity; his victim argues for equitable distribution of 'Nature's full blessings'. Missing in both the Bridgewater and Trinity manuscripts are twenty lines in praise of 'the sun-clad power of chastity', 'the sage and serious doctrine of virginity',[56] intended for the mouth of the Lady. While Comus is calling such thoughts 'mere moral babble' and is trying again to make the Lady drink of the enchanted cup, 'the brothers rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground'. There is a brief struggle with the ugly-headed monsters, but all are routed. In the confusion the two young heroes forget to snatch the magic wand of Comus (to have done so would have ended the entertainment too soon), and so their sister is 'all chained up in alabaster'. Lawes arrives to tell them:

We cannot free the lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixed, and motionless. (818–19)

It is now necessary to invoke the aid of the gentle nymph Sabrina, who, dwelling in the nearby river Severn,

will be swift
To aid a virgin such as was herself
In hard-besetting need . . . (855–7)

Lawes calls upon her in a lovely song:[57]

Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save. (859–66)

From this point until the end of the masque the poetry is exceptionally light and lyric. There are verses that may or may not have been sung,[58] and finally 'Sabrina rises, attended by water-nymphs'. She sings, and then replies to the Spirit's request for help:

Shepherd, 'tis my office best
To help ensnarèd chastity.
Brightest lady, look on me.
Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure
I have kept of precious cure.
Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
Next this marble venomed seat
Smeared with gums of glutinous heat
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.
Now the spell hath lost his hold . . . (908–19)

After another song,[59] in which Sabrina is suitably thanked for her aid, Lawes hurries his young charges off to their father's residence, which is 'not many furlongs hence'. He explains that many friends and townspeople are already there, to congratulate the Earl upon his new position:

We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer. (953–5)

Now the scene becomes Ludlow Castle in reality, and the country dancers enter to perform with 'duck or nod' before the courtly guests. This is the second anti-masque, and it is ended by Lawes's appearance with the three children. He sings:

Back, shepherds, back; enough your play
Till next sunshine holiday.

Here be without duck or nod
Other trippings to be trod,
Of lighter toes and such court guise
As Mercury did first devise
With the mincing Dryades
On the lawns and on the leas. (958-65)

In a second song the children are then presented to their mother and father, and formal dancing follows, participated in by the young people and the courtly guests. The evening's entertainment is finally brought to a close with a memorable epilogue, sung by Lawes:[60]

But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.
Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue; she alone is free;
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her. (1012-23)

It is time for the children to be put to bed.

Judged by almost any standard, Milton's masque is composed of beautiful and charming poetry. Its music is deftly varied; its sonorous blank verse is sufficiently relieved by rime; and its diction is now simple, now richly allusive. One may think of the morality as Christian,[61] but it is peopled with pagan deities and dozens of creatures fresh from mythology. Jove is its presiding spirit, and the gods are mentioned six times more often than Providence. Fairies and elves, nymphs and naiades, flit always in the immediate background; and as natural as the Lady's reliance upon chastity is the attendant Spirit's invocation of Sabrina:

Listen and appear to us
In name of great Oceanus,
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace,
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian wizard's hook,
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell,
By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands,
By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of sirens sweet,
By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb . . . (867-80)

This mosaic leads to no bare Puritan altar. The adoration of virtue in Milton's masque is a matter of high ritual in Arcadia, with Plato and Spenser as priests and all mythology in attendance. Listening, one would not believe that Elizabeth had been dead for thirty-one years.

It is interesting to speculate on the role of Comus in the entertainment. His was a larger part than that of any of the three children—a part second only to that of Henry Lawes in importance. It is difficult to avoid the conjecture that Milton may have played Comus himself. Almost certainly the actor of this role was no member of the Egerton family or of any other noble family; otherwise, it would have been a discourtesy of Lawes in 1637, and Milton in 1645, to omit the person's name in the lists of 'the chief persons which presented'. The actor was no fellow musician of Lawes, or at least one song would have been written for him. Perhaps Comus was played by some professional actor, but against this supposition is the peculiarly intimate nature of the performance at Ludlow Castle. The masque was essentially a children's party, with the three Egerton youngsters playing themselves, with Alice's music tutor playing himself part of the time, and with the parents drawn into the climax. On such an occasion Milton might have been persuaded to recite some of his own most effective poetry and to act the role of his own most lively character. Proof is lacking; but the conjecture has quite as much plausibility as many others about Milton which have long since been accepted.

Because he put some of the best poetry into the mouth of his villain, was Milton of Comus's party without realizing it? Some critics have argued so, though there is not the slightest reason to believe that the poet had any sympathy with the evil in Comus. 'No one combines poison with gall or with hellebore, but with savory sauces and delicacies. . . . So the devil steeps whatever deadly dish he prepares in God's most pleasing gifts.' Milton read these words in a 1634 edition of Tertullian, and later copied them into a Commonplace Book, adding the comment: 'In moral evil much good can be mixed and that with remarkable cunning.'[62] He knew well whereof he wrote.

But what did Milton's father, the retired businessman, think of the masque as written? Did he approve of the speeches composed for Comus the enchanter? What did people say to him about the boy whom he had dedicated from birth for the ministry? Did the unknown older friend, to whom Milton had apologized in a letter the year before, have something to say to the father on this occasion? We cannot with certainty answer these questions, yet we cannot escape asking them. We can be reasonably certain that Milton's father heard from Henry Lawes about the success of the entertainment. But when Lawes, three years later, decided to publish *Comus*, he had to explain (using a familiar formula) that it was 'not openly acknowledged by the Author'. The author did, however, supply a motto for the title page, from Virgil's second eclogue: 'Alas! what have I chosen for my miserable self? Ruined, I have let the south wind in among my flowers.' This has been taken to mean that Milton deprecated any criticism of his masque—that he was reluctant to come out of privacy and run the risks of publication[63]—but the quotation, in context, means that the shepherd accuses himself of *neglecting his proper business*. Still, an ambiguity remains: the pastoral poet who penned the words quoted was eventually to write an epic.

After composing the masque and relishing its warm reception, Milton must have been more than ever convinced of his poetical destiny. Many other boys at Cambridge had written verses; some of these other boys, by contributing to University collections and writing commendatory poems for various published books, were already better known than he. But *Comus* was a major achievement. Its author, whatever he had thought before, must have realized that his future ministry would be coupled with verse. Preparation for this future ministry—with no more masquing—was to occupy him for the next three years. But the nature of that ministry was soon to be redefined.

It was probably about this time, though perhaps later, that Milton's father announced his decision to leave Hammersmith and move farther into the country.[64] In any case, during the last week of November 1634, Milton awoke one morning with a sudden idea. At daybreak he set about translating Psalm 114 into Greek heroic metre.[65] He had not attempted Greek verse since his schooldays at St. Paul's. Moreover, he had last paraphrased Psalm 114 during those same schooldays, ten long years ago. Trying it again, therefore, he may have been conscious of closing a cycle in his development. The words of the Hebrew poet may have seemed more than ever eloquent now; the psalm was the voice of those protected by God in exile, the voice of fugitives. Enclosing his new version in a letter to Alexander Gill on 4 December, he made a cryptic but urgent request: 'Expect me at the bookseller's in London on Monday, and meanwhile, if you can do anything to further my cause with the Doctor, this year's president of the College, through your friendship with him, please for my sake go to him as soon as you possibly can.' What was meant by this we do not know, but it seems likely that Milton was anticipating some alteration in his life at 'our suburban residence'.[66]

His letter, in elegant Latin, acknowledged receipt of a communication from Gill accompanied by some hendecasyllabic verses. Although he has 'at hand some things of our own in this kind', he chooses to repay his friend with the recent translation. He had written no Greek since leaving St. Paul's because 'whoever spends study and pains in this age on Greek composition runs a risk of singing to deaf ears'. As Gill knows, he has been writing verse in Latin and English instead, and he fears that Gill will find the Greek not coming up to his usual opinion of Milton's productions.

Probably when they met in London on 8 December, Gill, like a good schoolteacher, encouraged the former Pauline to write some more in Greek. On the following day Milton became twenty-six. Perhaps then, perhaps much later, he wrote five lines of Greek hexameter with the elaborate title (in Latin with some Greek): 'A philosopher, *on his way to death*, unexpectedly sent this message to the king who ignorantly had condemned him, seized by chance among criminals, unrecognized and guiltless.' The brief message exhibits the nameless philosopher more concerned with the king's education than with his own safety: 'Know, O king, if you slay me, a law-abiding citizen who has done absolutely no harm to any man, you might as easily be cutting off the wisest of heads, then afterwards realizing your reckless error and sorely grieving that you had slain so famous a bulwark of your city.' The philosopher's words lift one element in an actual situation (his innocence) into an apparently theoretical situation which *is* the whole actual situation. But the king is invited to ponder the theory. The poem may have been suggested by Gill's unfortunate clash with Laud and the Star Chamber, and his subsequent pardon by King Charles on 30 November 1630.[67]

On 8 January 1635 Milton's father had to ride to London on business. At some time afterwards, he moved his family from their suburban home in Hammersmith to a place in Buckinghamshire. We do not know the reason or reasons for this second uprooting, but the trouble of having to depose in Chancery suits involving his past business as a scrivener may have had something to do with it.[68] He was now seventy-two, too old for tiring journeys to the city, especially in early January. In 1634 his turn had come to be Master of the Scriveners Company, and he had refused, relinquishing the honour and responsibility to his old acquaintance Charles Yeomans.[69] On 12 May 1636, when he was appointed an Assistant to the Company, he again resigned, this time because of his 'removal to inhabit in the country'.[70] If the scriveners needed a Milton in their affairs, there was Richard, who had been his apprentice up to 1621.[71] If the courts needed someone to testify on details of almost forgotten transactions, let Thomas Bower, his former partner, do the deposing, using, if necessary, the 'shop book' he had left with him.[72] Bower could also pursue such unfinished business as their thus far futile attempt to recover money owed them by the Ewens estate. In October or November of 1633 they had brought suit in Chancery against the various persons involved, but nothing had come of it. The complications fairly symbolized the kind of troubles the retired scrivener was trying to escape. Both the borrower of the money and his heir were dead, and dead too was the original lender of the money, whom Milton had meanwhile reimbursed, so that he and Bower were £50 out of pocket.[73]

Sympathizing with his father's troubles, young John helped to pack for the journey to Horton.

# 5. Horton, 1635–1638

MILTON's Horton period was one of relentless study. So far as we know, during 1635, 1636, and the first ten months of 1637 he wrote no verse. Doubtless he continued to dream of immortality as a Latin and English poet, but, as the opening lines of *Lycidas* more than hint, he realized that increased knowledge and maturity were necessary to give his writing the richness and significance his youthful performances had lacked. Both the opening and closing passages of *Ad Patrem* indicate that he regarded his previous work as *iuvenilia carmina*. His was a 'slow-endeavouring art' compared with that of the 'more timely-happy'; it was his destiny to be slow in development. And the remedy was obvious: to his aged parent he conceded the prosaic nature of preparation. There would be no more writing of masques. There would be only reading and note-taking—and more reading. What he needed to know could be found in books, and books can be read anywhere.

The peaceful village of Horton, to which the retired scrivener had moved his family from Hammersmith, was only about seventeen miles west of Westminster, but still far from the business of the world. The westbound highway from Brentford and London passed through Colnbrook, about a mile away, and Colnbrook had shops and inns and the concerns of a small town that knew many travellers. But Horton had only its few homes, and the Manor House where the Bulstrode family lived, and the Rectory, and the old church, and then, the broad meadows of Buckinghamshire.[1] The river Coln flowed nearby; in the distance were the towers of Windsor; and all around were trees and brooks and the green English countryside. If one wanted quiet and seclusion for three years of intensive reading and study, this was an ideal spot.

The nature and general outline of Milton's reading during these 'studious and contemplative years altogether spent in the search of religious and civil knowledge'[2] can still be traced from the notes made in a Commonplace Book, dating from about 1635,[3] and from incidental comments in his anti-episcopal pamphlets of 1641 and 1642. In the Horton period, Milton read (or returned to) Dante, Boccaccio (*Vita di Dante*), and Ariosto, but his chief reading was in history, particularly the history of the Christian church from its very beginnings. Characteristically, he went about this in a thorough, systematic way, following 'the method of time'. His note-taking (at first in Greek, Italian, but chiefly Latin) was also methodical, done in at least three broad categories, the sub-topics of which reveal his interests—*ethical*: moral evil, avarice, gluttony, suicide, the knowledge of literature, curiosity, music, sloth, lying; *economic*: food, conduct, matrimony, the education of children, poverty, alms, usury; and *political*: the state, kings (two pages), subjects, nobility, property and taxes, plague, athletic games, public shows.[4] Actually, there were not many such notes made in this period—about fifty-seven in all, from twenty-one authors in eighteen books[5]—but a theological notebook, begun then or later,[6] and now lost, may have contained a great many more. In this reading programme, self-cultivation was partly his motive: he thought 'it the part of a well-learned man to have read diligently the ancient stories of the Church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the Fathers'.[7] But preparation was the greater motive. He was still dedicated to the service of religion, whether in poetry or in prose. Further study, if it was to be countenanced by Milton's father, had to have a direct and obvious pertinence for his future ministry.

His reading seems to have begun with the *Ecclesiasticæ Historiæ Autores*. He bought or borrowed the Greek edition published in Paris in 1544. This formidable tome contained the church histories of Eusebius, Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, Theodoret, Evagrius, Theodorus, and Dorotheus. After studying the ten books of the *Historia* of Eusebius, 'the ancientest writer extant of Church-history',[8] he proceeded to this author's life of Constantine, and then to the *Historia* in seven books of Socrates Scholasticus. At that point or a little later, perhaps to relieve the tedium of this kind of reading, he turned aside to study the *Historia Miscella* compiled by Paulus Diaconus. At some point it also occurred to him that, in addition to reading these many histories, he should be going behind them, to the writings of the early Fathers themselves. When he did so, he made discoveries that coloured his future attitudes and led to some important intellectual convictions.

Reading as a Christian, he admired the holiness and 'personal excellence' of such early Fathers as Cyprian, and noticed in their testimony 'the remaining sparks of original truth'.[9] Reading as a Protestant, however, he was more impressed by the evidence that 'those purer times were corrupt, and their books corrupted soon after.'[10] In 'the ancientest and most virgin times between Christ and Constantine', in 'the stories of those Greek and Roman exploits', he 'found many things both nobly done and worthily spoken'; but he did not fail 'to mark how corruption and apostasy crept in by degrees'.[11] Five years or so later, he was to ask in his tract *Of Reformation*, the first part of which is a direct product of this study of church history: 'Who is ignorant of the foul errors, the ridiculous wresting of Scripture, the heresies, the vanities thick sown through the volumes of Justin Martyr, Clemens, Origen, Tertullian, and others of eldest time?'[12]

Reading the *Epistolæ* of Ignatius, 'the ancientest of the extant Fathers', he was disturbed by the doubtful authenticity of the text, but observed with grim satisfaction the testimony that heresies were rife in the churches of Asia even in the earliest days.[13] Studying the *Opera* of Justin Martyr (perhaps in the new, 1636 edition), he was outraged by the story of devils begotten by angels mixing with women, but approvingly noted in his Commonplace Book the early Christian view that 'willing service' is due a king, 'worship' granted to God alone.[14] From the works of Clement of Alexandria he copied a note on lying (*quatenus licet*) and a rule for feminine fashions: 'women should not expose themselves beyond what is necessary.'[15] Marriage of the clergy, he noticed, was sanctioned by the testimony of Ignatius, Clement, Cyprian, and Eusebius.[16] Moreover, Justin Martyr had the interesting opinion that polygamy among the ancient Jews had been allowed because of the mysteries involved in it.[17] In the time of Tertullian 'all allowable tradition was now lost'; his characterization of St. Paul filled Milton with indignation; yet the determined reader gleaned something, copying in his note-book the views of Tertullian on moral evil, gluttony, kings, and dramatic spectacles.[18] In the *Epistolæ* of Cyprian, Milton found still more to his liking: ancient testimony to the election of bishops by suffrage of the people, and proof of episcopal humility.[19]

This much reading took, by Milton's own statement, 'some years'—maybe all of 1635 and 1636.[20] Probably it was difficult to obtain some of the books needed; certainly the routine of study was occasionally broken by visits to London booksellers. In 1636, we know, Milton purchased the *Orationes LXXX* of John Chrysostom; in 1637, the *Allegoriæ in Homeri fabulas de dijs* of Heraclides of Pontus.[21] In 1635, we are told (though no record survives), he was incorporated Master of Arts at Oxford University,[22] presumably to make use of the resources of the Bodleian Library. Oxford was about thirty-six miles from Horton, and John Rouse, chief librarian of Bodley, earned in time the sincere gratitude of Milton.[23] The learned and 'ever-memorable' John Hales of Eton, a 'walking library', may also have been a useful friend of the Horton days.[24]

The reading went slowly, not only because of the need for absorption, but also because of the hard, crabbed, abstruse style of so many of the books. The student was later to criticize bitterly 'the knotty Africanisms, the pampered metaphors, the intricate and involved sentences of the Fathers, besides the fantastic and declamatory flashes, the cross-jingling periods which cannot but disturb'.[25] Despite his ambitious beginning, he eventually realized that 'if he undertake all, the length of a man's life cannot extend to give him a full and requisite knowledge of what was done in antiquity.'[26] Milton modified his original plan of study when he reached the reign of Constantine:

> coming in the method of time to that age wherein the Church had obtained a Christian emperor, I so prepared myself, as being now to read examples of wisdom and goodness among those who were foremost in the Church, not elsewhere to be paralleled. But to the amazement of what I expected . . . I found it all quite contrary—excepting in some very few, nothing but ambition, corruption, contention, combustion . . . Finding, therefore, the most of their actions in single to be weak, and yet turbulent, full of strife, and yet flat of spirit, and the sum of their best Councils there collected to be most commonly in questions either trivial and vain, or else of short and easy decision without that great bustle which they made, I concluded that if their single ambition and ignorance was such, then certainly united in a Council it would be much more; and if the compendious recital of what they there did was so tedious and unprofitable, then surely to sit out the whole extent of their tattle in a dozen volumes would be a loss of time irrecoverable.[27]

The tedious 'dozen volumes' Milton read only 'here and there'. He did, however, make it a point to 'read into them all.' He completed the distasteful task with a conviction that, given sufficient reason (or provocation), he could 'in three months be an expert councilist.'

Although unwilling to waste 'his precious hours in the endless conferring of Councils and conclaves that demolish one another',[28] Milton nevertheless continued his study of history, reading some of the continuators of Eusebius.[29] He had seen enough of the Fathers, with their 'books in bigness and number so endless and immeasurable'.[30] There was simply not time to study Ambrose, Athanasius, Basil, or even Jerome, 'the learnedest of the Fathers',[31] though there may have been time to 'read into' some of them. In any case, he developed a profound dislike for their 'innumerable and therefore unnecessary and unmerciful volumes'.[32]

From the historians he learned about the Church under Constantine—'the dim taper of this emperor's age that had such need of snuffing'.[33] He was not deceived by the praise of so cruel and corrupt a ruler, called latterly 'the lodestar of Reformation', for what did Constantine contribute? 'He appointed certain times for fasts and feasts, built stately churches, gave large immunities to the clergy, great riches and promotions to bishops, gave and ministered occasion to bring in a deluge of ceremonies, thereby either to draw in the heathen by a resemblance of their rites, or to set a gloss upon the simplicity and plainness of Christianity, which to the gorgeous solemnities of paganism and the sense of the World's Children seemed but a homely and yeomanly religion, for the beauty of inward sanctity was not within their prospect.'[34] Milton's Protestant soul rebelled in horror, but he read on grimly, as the black and settled night of ignorance and anti-Christian tyranny descended on the western world, and 'the bright and blissful Reformation' waited in the womb of time.

Meanwhile, there were crumbs of knowledge and opinion for the student to pick up, some of which might prove useful. Sulpicius Severus had condemned the willingness of the Jews to exchange liberty for slavery, and had said that the name of king has always been hateful to free people. Later, he had declared that the British bishops were notable for their poverty, even in the time of Constantine.[35] Socrates Scholasticus had noted that Ignatius was the first to arrange antiphonal singing in the Church. He had also reported the saying of Bishop Atticus of Constantinople that one should give alms, not to beggars, but only to those ashamed to ask.[36] From the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Evagrius, Milton learned a strange new word, *chrysargurum*, the tribute exacted from courtesans.[37] All these things he copied into his Commonplace Book, along with some facts from the *Vita Constantini*, which he liked despite his contempt for the emperor. Constantine, according to his biographer, by edict exempted the clergy from civil duties, and urged that fundamental questions about God which the human reason finds it difficult to interpret or to solve should be ignored lest they become known to the common people and provide material for schisms in the Church.[38]

Some of the notes made by Milton in his reading of ecclesiastical history seem almost a commentary on *Comus* and *Ad Patrem*. Both Tertullian and Cyprian had condemned dramatic poetry, even if 'artistically composed by a poet in no wise lacking in skill'. Milton recorded their opinions, later to be refuted, not only in the Commonplace Book but also in a public statement. He made no refutation now, but did copy with satisfaction the decision of Socrates Scholasticus that Christians might spend time upon profane writers.[39]

Meanwhile, intimations of mortality broke in upon his studies from time to time. On 17 November 1635 his former teacher, old Mr. Gill, died, and he was buried three days later in Mercers' Chapel.[40] Milton may have gone to London for the funeral; if so, he could have congratulated young Alexander Gill upon his prompt appointment as high master of St. Paul's School. The father had been seventy-one when he died; Milton's own father was now about seventy-three. Some months later, on 11 March 1636, the Countess of Bridgewater died.[41] Possibly Milton went to Harefield to pay his respects to the ageing Countess Dowager of Derby, who herself had less than a year to live. London suffered a recurrence of the plague in 1636, and the midsummer and Michaelmas law terms were adjourned. Christopher probably left his unsafe quarters in the Inner Temple, and joined his family at Horton. It is likely that Anne and her children came too.

We are not certain about the year, but at some time after 1631 (and probably on 5 January 1632) Milton's sister had remarried. Her new husband, Thomas Agar, had been an intimate friend of the late Edward Phillips, and had succeeded him in his post as Deputy Clerk of the Crown in the court of Chancery.[42] He was a widower, with a daughter named Anne, and the marriage had had an air of inevitability about it. It is reasonable to suppose that John attended their wedding—as he probably did that, on 28 July 1635, of John Diodati to Isabel Underwood, at St. Margaret's, Westminster, a likely occasion for a happy reunion of Milton and his friend Charles.[43] Before three years could pass, Isabel would be dead—but in the Horton days of preparation for a lifetime of important work, one did not contemplate such possibilities.

The study of history continued. Writing to Charles Diodati on 2 November 1637 Milton excused himself for being a poor correspondent: 'your method of study, I know, allows frequent breathing-spaces, visits to friends, a good deal of writing, and not infrequent journeys; but my own disposition is such that no delay, no rest, no thought or care for anything else, can divert me from my purpose, until I reach my goal and complete some great cycle of my studies.'[44] He had not yet completed a cycle in his studies. Three weeks later, answering a letter from his friend, he was far more explicit: 'My study of Greek history has brought me, by continuous reading, down to the time when they ceased to be Greeks. I have spent much time on the obscure history of Italy under the Lombards, Franks, and Germans, down to the point [*c*. 1273] when it was set free by Rudolph, King of Germany. What follows, the history of each independent state, will best be studied separately. . . . Meanwhile, if it is not too much trouble, please send me Giustiniani's history of Venice. I promise either to keep it safe until you come or, if you prefer, return it in a short time.'[45] This account gives us an important check on the Commonplace Book entries as a record of Milton's reading in this period. He had studied the Western Empire through the Middle Ages (in the *Historia Miscella* based on Paulus Diaconus and in the *De Occidentali Imperio* and *De Regno Italiæ* of Sigonius). The notes he saw fit to take from these authorities were all on kingship—tributes as a sign of authority, the beginnings of emperor-worship, the possibility of a people being released from their oath of allegiance to a bad king.[46]

Milton was more and more recognizing the relevance of his reading to contemporary problems of politics and religion. We can be certain that various convictions were growing upon him. He knew now that 'those "purer times" were no such as they are cried up, and not to be followed without suspicion, doubt, and danger.' He no longer felt 'that over-awful esteem of those more ancient than trusty Fathers' and he was ready to answer any votary who held them in 'blind reverence.' Having ploughed through 'that indigested heap and fry of authors which they call Antiquity', he was almost prepared to summarize Church history as 'the foul and sudden corruption, and then, after many a tedious age, the long-deferred but much more wonderful and happy reformation . . . in these latter days.' A Christian should reverence the martyrs, but should 'rely only upon the

Scriptures'. Did not the best of the ancients 'disclaim that any man should repose on them, and send all to the Scriptures'? The Gospel was sufficient rule and oracle for any intelligent person.[47]

Milton's studies were undertaken with a view, not to becoming a teacher or an historian, but simply to making himself an informed speaker and writer on religious and political affairs. His notions of what constituted competency for a man of God were very high, but they were not impracticable. He proved that they were not. As he moved steadily toward the achievement of his goal, his contempt grew for the ill-trained, illiterate products of the universities. These greasy sophisters, stuffed with superstition and empty speculation, hurried into the ministry, where they hungered for 'worldly riches and honours, with an easy and intemperate life, to the bane of Christianity'. Hirelings they were, many of them, or rather 'ravenous and savage wolves threatening inroads and bloody incursions upon the flock of Christ, which they took upon them to feed, but now claim to devour as their prey.'[48]

His newly acquired knowledge of the past increased his awareness of present corruption in the Church, and roused his ire toward modern prelacy, which imitated the senseless ceremonies of antiquity, bringing 'the inward acts of the spirit to the outward and customary eye-service of the body'.[49] However busy with his studies at Horton, Milton could not fail to notice a recent aggravation of episcopal tyranny. More and more stringent measures were being taken against nonconformists of all sorts. William Laud, a threatening force in state and ecclesiastical policy since the days of his friendship with Buckingham, had finally, in August of 1633, achieved the archbishopric, and had declared open war upon all parish ministers who dared to disagree with his notions of Church discipline. Backed by the Star Chamber and the notorious Court of High Commission, he had the power to inflict swift and ruthless punishment. Turning churchwardens into informers under oath, searching out dissidence by means of the archiepiscopal visitation, he began a steady series of prosecutions. Prelacy was in the saddle, and it was conform, or face the consequences! Puritans of conscience and honesty, who had enjoyed safety within the Church under the tolerance of such leaders as Abbot and Williams, found their position increasingly dangerous.[50]

When Milton had graduated from Cambridge in 1632, it was still possible to enter the Church of England without being a Laudian. A person of vaguely Calvinistic sentiments like himself could easily have obtained a living and contrived, somehow, to avoid compliance with many of the required forms and ceremonies. He had observed his own former tutor, Thomas Young, doing just that in his ministry at Stowmarket. There were various bishops known to be liberal in their attitudes, and a parish in the right diocese would probably have gone unmolested. Better still, he might have become a 'lecturer', confining himself to religious teaching and performing no church rites at all. This device had been originated by Puritans, and was a congenial solution for a young man educated for the ministry but unwilling to conform to episcopal discipline. A committee in London (one member of which had been Mr. Stock of Milton's own church in Bread Street) was busying itself with finding parishes for these lecturers.

Archbishop Laud, however, was determined to put an end to all such laxity and evasion. So successful was he that many Puritans were put in the position of either becoming martyrs or compromising with their convictions. Milton expressed the dilemma starkly, several years later, when explaining how he himself had been 'church-outed by the prelates': 'coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church—that he who would take orders must subscribe slave and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure or split his faith—I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence, before the sacred office of speaking bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.'[51] This eloquent and indignant passage is, however, an incomplete and over-simplified statement of Milton's personal problem. Addressing a Puritan audience, he was attempting to justify his right to 'meddle' in religious controversy. He had no reason to tell this audience all the factors that contributed to his decision. Nevertheless, in other parts of this same pamphlet, he explains a great deal.

If Episcopacy and an oath had alone restrained him, Milton would presumably have taken Holy Orders soon after the prelates had been removed from power. Surely in this passage he was not trying to show himself morally superior to his Presbyterian friends who had chosen to take the oath and had survived to see the downfall of Laud. Rather, he was expressing his horror at an ugly situation, and was giving *one* reason why he had not become a clergyman. Another reason is to be found in his reply to an anonymous opponent who had accused him of seeking a 'lecture' in the Church: 'This I cannot omit without ingratitude to that Providence above who hath ever bred me up in plenty, although my life hath not been unexpensive in learning and voyaging about: so long as it shall please Him to lend me what He hath hitherto thought good, which is enough to serve me in all honest and liberal occasions, and something over besides, I were unthankful to that Highest Bounty if I should make myself so poor as to solicit needily any such kind of "rich hopes" as this fortune-teller dreams of.'[52] Later, in this same *Apology* (1642), he declares further: 'I am not altogether so rustic and nothing so irreligious, but as far distant from a lecturer as the merest laic, for any consecrating hand of a prelate that shall ever touch me.'[53]

In the Horton period Milton's conception of his own Christian ministry had slowly crystallized. It was a conception resulting, not only from the tyranny which 'had invaded the Church', but also from an impelling awareness of literary interests. Laud helped to determine it, but so did

*Comus*, so did the study of history. To some unknown extent, so did Charles Diodati.[54] Milton had finally realized that his own ministry lay outside the Church, as a man of letters, financially independent and free to write as he pleased. There was no necessity for saying so directly in *The Reason of Church Government* because the pamphlet itself was plain evidence of the fact, an illustration of the fact, and elsewhere in it he spoke frankly of other literary plans. His life was still dedicated to God and the true Church; he still had the conscious warrant of some high calling. But his conception of service had altered.[55]

This is not to say that during the Horton period Milton turned from the Church to Poetry. His activity during the Horton period—indeed, his whole life—was a denial of so exclusive and restrictive a choice, which posterity has stubbornly attributed to him. We must not forget that his decision, whenever it was made, certainly met with his father's acquiescence, because financial independence was vital to the grand design. In *Ad Patrem* he had emphasized the fact that knowledge of history and a natural talent were his sole resources, yet he thanked his parent for not forcing him into some money-making profession. Clearly the scrivener was willing to support his unusual son, but not as a poet. On what terms then?

What probably happened was this: Milton left Cambridge quite amenable to the old idea of becoming a minister, but with two important reservations. The first, a deep need for additional preparation, his father sympathetically recognized. The second, a growing desire to win glory as a poet, his father regarded with hostility. The writing of *Comus* particularly aggravated the problem, for it not only disturbed the parent but convinced Milton even more of his destiny. To make matters worse, the state of the Church was less and less inviting to anyone of nonconformist principles. Milton therefore placated his father by giving up poetry for a time, and then, applying himself to the study of Church history, convinced him that a man of learning, made independent of ecclesiastical control, could perform a wider Christian ministry as an author. The first return on the scrivener's investment came seven years after *Comus*, with a scholarly treatise *Of Reformation touching Church-discipline in England*, a direct product of the Horton studies. Meanwhile, Milton and his father understood one another again, and the young man carefully avoided annoying his parent.

The parent had worries enough in 1637. He had long since retired from business, but now, out of the past, transactions he had forgotten came to disturb his peace in the shape of a lawsuit. It was all very confusing and very upsetting. One of his oldest customers had been John Cotton, who had died a year or so before.[56] Since 1590 or thereabouts, John Cotton had brought the scrivener money to be loaned out at eight per cent.—£3,000, more or less, it had amounted to. There had never been any difficulty until the Easter term of 1630, when they had discussed the weakness of some of the securities, and Cotton, fearful of losing many of his investments, had offered Milton all of the bonds for £2,000 in cash. Milton had refused, indignant at the implied discredit to his business methods. Later, it seems, Cotton had approached Thomas Bower, Milton's partner, and on 25 November 1630 Bower had taken the bonds off his hands, hoping to make a considerable profit. Now Cotton was dead, and Sir Thomas Cotton, his grandnephew and executor, accused Milton and Bower of collusion and conspiracy to defraud. They had even (said his bill) plotted with Thomas Holchar, the old man's attorney, and Thomas Colwell, at whose house Cotton lived, to cheat the victim out of part of his estate.[57]

Sir Thomas Cotton's bill was dated 28 May 1636,[58] but the plague in London, and the consequent adjournment of the midsummer and Michaelmas terms, caused action to be delayed. Milton was served with a summons on 27 January 1637, and he promptly engaged an attorney, George Miller, to represent him.[59] Miller certified to the court that his client was an old man, unfit for travel, and he had a writ of *dedimus potestatem* made out for taking his answer in the country. A writ, dated 10 March, authorized the commissioners for Buckinghamshire to receive Milton's answers on oath, to certify them, and to transmit them to the Court of Requests within three weeks of Easter.[60] This writ was apparently addressed to John and Thomas Agar.[61] On 1 April 1637 Christopher Milton, twenty-one and still a student of the Inner Temple, appeared in court and made affidavit 'that his said father, being aged about seventy-four years, is not by reason of his said age and infirmity able to travel to the City of Westminster . . . without much prejudice to his health'.[62]

Christopher and the Agars helped out in London, John stood by at Horton—the elderly scrivener needed his children now. In the midst of this worry, on 3 April, Sara Milton, the poet's mother, died. Three days later they buried her, tenderly, in Horton Church. And three days after the funeral the bereaved family spent Easter Sunday together.[63]

On 13 April the grieving widower turned in his formal answer to Cotton.[64] He was hazy about some of the facts in the case, but he denied having any part in, or even certain knowledge of, the agreement made between John Cotton and Thomas Bower. Whatever had happened, it was a private dealing, and outside his partnership with Bower. He begged, therefore, to be dismissed and reimbursed for his legal expenses wrongfully sustained.

According to the law, Sir Thomas now had two full terms in which to prepare a reply or proceed further. As a matter of fact, nothing more happened during the remainder of 1637, except that Bower supplemented his first answer, dated 8 April, with a brief statement, dated 5 December.[65] Meanwhile, the Miltons awaited the decision of the court.

If it was difficult for the scrivener to travel, it was also dangerous for him to stay at Horton, for the plague visited the small community soon after Sara Milton's death. It was a very dry spring, with cold easterly winds; little rain, but heavy mists every morning. Late in April there was a burial from the plague in nearby Colnbrook. On 15 May three victims were buried from the Talbot Inn. In June there were three more deaths; in July five, all of Colnbrook. By August the number had fallen to two.[66]

Death was much on the younger Milton's mind in 1637. Early in the year, on 28 January, he may have attended the funeral at Harefield of the Countess Dowager of Derby, for whom he had written *Arcades*. On 9 August the great Jonson had been buried in Westminster Abbey, and men had told each other that English poetry was dead. Late in June Milton may have been in London to witness the public disgrace and horrible punishment of three Puritans who had offended Laud. The times were most disquieting.[67] The house at Horton probably seemed more isolated than ever, an empty house.

In the autumn, perhaps in mid October, Milton went on a journey.[68] It seems altogether likely that he revisited Cambridge, to seek out old acquaintances and renew pleasant associations. If so, it was then that he first heard of the shipwreck and drowning of Edward King in the Irish Sea on 10 August, and of the proposal for a volume of memorial verses.[69] He remembered King very well. The younger man—he was three years Milton's junior—had entered Christ's College in Milton's second year, and had been very popular in the University community. Indeed, he had been made a Fellow in 1630, when he held only the B.A. degree. Although they had probably not been intimate friends, Milton respected King's learning and personal character. The drowning was a tragic event.[70]

On his return to Horton, the traveller went out of his way to visit John Diodati in London, hoping for news of his friend Charles, now living in the North. The plain truth is that Milton was lonely. After so many years of unremitting study, he was growing restless. Later he was to speak with feeling of 'the wearisome labours and studious watchings wherein I have spent and tired out almost a whole youth'.[71] He had not reached the end of his ambitious reading programme, but he was fretting under the strain. Proud of his perseverance and determined to see it through, he nevertheless felt cut off from human society. Particularly he missed the companionship of his oldest friend. The last time Charles had been in London he had promised to pay Milton a visit in the country, but he had gone off to the North without explanation. There had been no word from him in a long while. Recently, hearing from someone in London that Diodati had returned, Milton had rushed to his friend's usual lodgings in high anticipation, only to find the rumour false.

There was much to tell Charles. Henry Lawes had decided to publish *Comus*, to save himself the trouble of making copies of the masque for enthusiastic friends, and Milton, not wishing to arouse his father's antagonism again, had decided that a modest anonymity would be best.

And so, some time in 1637, the poem appeared in print without its author's name, but with a graceful dedication by Lawes to John Egerton, Viscount Brackley.[72]

Before leaving London, and probably on 2 November, Milton hurriedly penned a letter to Charles. In a jocular strain he scolded his friend for not writing, and begged for news. His own news could wait until their next meeting, but Diodati must answer a half-dozen questions promptly.[73]

Back at Horton, with all its memories of an absent face, Milton thought about King's untimely death. Certain comparisons were inevitable. Like himself, King had been a poet.[74] Like himself, King had intended to enter the Church, to take Holy Orders. Like himself, King had postponed the event, preparing himself, presumably, for a more effective ministry. Milton had studied at Hammersmith and Horton; King had stayed on at the University. And King's life, like Milton's, had thus far been all promise—no fulfilment. Now the promise was suddenly withdrawn. Thinking about it, Milton must have said to himself, 'There, but for the grace of God, go I!' What an appalling thought, that one with great work to do may die before the work is even begun! Yes, he would contribute to the memorial volume. There was a poem he wanted to write, a poem he felt compelled to write. There were questions to be asked of himself, and answers to be found, if answers there were.

A letter arrived from Charles, a foolish, friendly, characteristic letter, forbidding Milton to be sick without his permission, wishing him good health a thousandfold, to his heart's content, to the very limit of his capacity and beyond—then threatening to withdraw health altogether should Milton prove a traitor to their friendship. He apologized for his shortcomings as a correspondent, told of his involvement in domestic difficulties with his stepmother, and gave a little further news.

Hearing from Charles was the tonic Milton needed. On 23 November, when he replied, he was again in London, planning to take rooms in one of the Inns of Court.[75] At Horton his life was 'obscure and cramped'; he wanted to be nearer 'congenial companions'. He hoped that Diodati might find it possible to return and take up winter quarters in London. As for the thousand or more good wishes, who did Charles now think he was—the High Steward of Health? Did the study of medicine give one a monopoly in this matter of health? Milton would like, please, to get sick without asking for special permission. There is much bantering in Milton's letter, along with much eager seriousness. His response to professed friendship is ardent in its idealism: 'Its roots and the source of its strength should go deep into the mind, and it should spring from a pure origin, so that, even should all mutual expressions of regard cease, yet it should endure a lifetime, untainted by suspicion or blame. For fostering such true friendship, letters are less essential than a lively recollection of virtues on both sides. . . . Your integrity writes to me in your stead, and inscribes true letters on my heart; your purity of life and love of virtue write to me; your uncommon character also writes to me, and commends you to me more and more.'

This intense and forthright avowal of affection is sandwiched between two passages of sheer flippancy, and Diodati knew how to interpret it. Charles could withdraw his horrific and hyperbolic threats, for John was no traitor to friendship. The virtue in Charles inspired affection because Virtue is Beauty, and 'whatever else is God's intention for me, of this I am certain, that He has instilled in me especially a mighty passion for Beauty. Ceres never sought her daughter Proserpine (as the story tells) with greater ardour than I do this Idea of Beauty . . . pursuing it by day and by night in every shape and form ("for many are the forms of things divine"), and following close in its footsteps as it leads. Therefore, when any man scorns the base opinions of the vulgar and dares to be, in thought and word and deed, what the wisest throughout the ages have approved, to such a man I am drawn by my nature, whenever I find him.' Immediately following this Platonic outburst, Milton turns to another part of Diodati's letter: 'Now I must satisfy your curiosity. You ask many questions, even about what I am thinking of. I will tell you, but let me whisper it in your ear (to spare my blushes!); and you must allow me for a moment to boast. What am I thinking of? So help me God, of immortality. What am I doing? Growing wings and learning to fly. My Pegasus can only rise on tender wings as yet, however, so let my new wisdom be humble. To be serious, my plan is to take rooms . . .' He leaves Charles guessing about the impending flight.

*Lycidas*, in the Trinity Manuscript version, was evidently complete in November, for the poem there was once headed 'Novemb: 1637' (later cancelled). To understand why this pastoral elegy was composed, why the long silence was at last broken, and why *Lycidas* is one of the most autobiographical of all Milton's minor verses, it is necessary to know, not only the specific event, but also the state of mind that prompted the form and content of the poem. This state of mind held in anxious suspension all the happenings of the year 1637.

The subject of *Lycidas* is premature death and the questions this raises about dedication and preparation—for the ministry and for poetry.[76] The pastoral form, which has so much and so needlessly disturbed a few literal-minded critics, is not to be explained altogether as an appropriate dress for elegy. It was that, in Milton's time, but it was also a convenient medium for the expression of emotion too personal for direct, unrestrained utterance. The long and learned convention of the pastoral elegy served to *objectify* feeling. It dignified while it comforted. It provided a sense of ritual, of public ceremony, for the soul-searching which Milton intended for his poem. He would speak, not as himself, but rather, in a dramatic lyric, as a nameless shepherd who, all one day, celebrated and lamented the death of a fellow poet-priest. This rural singer would, quite naturally, turn from the honoured dead to the problems of those left behind—the mystery of untimely death, the pointlessness of the dedicated life in a cosmos that permits such seeming injustice. To emphasize the universality of these questions, the poem would end with a reminder that it reported the thoughts and emotions of someone else.

And so, thus safeguarded, Milton begins *Lycidas* self-consciously. He is painfully aware of the unproductive years since *Comus*, of his yet incomplete preparation. Furthermore, he had meant to write no more poetry until his muse had matured. Still, King had died prematurely. The laurel, myrtle, and ivy—ancient symbols of triumphant verse and immortality—must again have their unripe berries disturbed:

> Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
> Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
> I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
> And with forced fingers rude
> Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
> Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
> Compels me to disturb your season due:
> For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
> Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
> Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew
> Himself to sing, and build the lofty rime.
> He must not float upon his watery bier
> Unwept, and welter to the parching wind
> Without the meed of some melodious tear.

Fourteen lines of verbal music, solemn yet subtly varied. The magic lies chiefly in tonal harmony. All that Milton had learned of repetition, effective alliteration, and particularly, assonance, is here employed. The fourth line is appropriately tense and restricted. Two lines are left unrimed, but throughout the passage the 'sere . . . tear' sound repeats like an insistent knell. Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for John Milton.

He makes this clear enough in his conventional invocation of the muses. The parallel between Edward King and himself is foremost in his mind:

> Begin then, sisters of the sacred well
> That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
> Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
> Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse;
> So may some gentle muse
> With lucky words favour my destined urn,
> And as he passes, turn
> And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.
> For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
> Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill. (15–24)

The 'hill' upon which they were both nursed was, of course, Cambridge, their Alma Mater. The artificial language and pretty symbolism of the pastoral are not, it must be understood, intended to disguise or deceive. Instead, they serve to *generalize* the specific and actual; they bring the solace of tradition to present sorrows. We need not inquire closely what university activities were meant by

> Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
> Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
> We drove afield, and both together heard
> What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
> Oft till the star that rose, at evening, bright,
> Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.
> Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute;
> Tempered to the oaten flute
> Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel
> From the glad sound would not be absent long,
> And old Damaetas loved to hear our song. (25-36)

It is enough if we realize that Milton and King—like countless young poet-shepherds before them—had lived the same kind of life, had enjoyed interests in common. King is not an individual in this context, nor is Milton; together they are poets in what had once seemed a friendly world. The vague language does not rob the passage of meaning; on the contrary, it links Milton's experience with the experiences of Moschus and Theocritus and Virgil. If we could identify 'old Damaetas' with a definite person at Cambridge,[77] the spell might be broken.

The pastoral tradition was both learned and artificial, but simplicity was its essence. Because this paradox was not always understood, few people had succeeded in naturalizing the tradition in English. Milton, however, realized that pastoral simplicity went beyond the mention of flocks and fauns and rural ditties; he dared to express the age-old sense of loss in language plain and repetitious:

> But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
> Now thou art gone, and never must return!
> Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
> With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes mourn. . . . (37-41)

Echoes, indeed. Abandoned nature laments the departed poet, and the nymphs, absent from the scene of the tragedy, know that they would have been useless. This fact reminds Milton of one of his favourite stories, the myth of Orpheus:

> What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
> The Muse herself, for her enchanting son

Whom universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore. (58–63)

Poets die suddenly, and the spirits that watch over poets are powerless to help. It happened to King; it could happen to Milton.

'Live, laugh, make the most of youth and the hours as they pass', Diodati had said to him. 'Why persist in hanging over books and studies all day and all night?'[78] There was once a convincing answer to this teasing question, but the death of King gave the whole problem new significance:

Alas, what boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade
And strictly meditate the thankless muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair? (64–69)

These lines must be read in their context. The sudden death of Lycidas 'ere his prime' causes Milton to wonder seriously whether it is better 'To scorn delights, and live laborious days' (72). Amaryllis and Neaera do not, as has been suggested, personify love poetry (or loss of chastity); they personify, as Milton tells us, 'delights'. The problem stated poetically in this passage is not one of 'serious' verse opposed to light verse (or virtue compared with its loss); it is a questioning of the Horton period of studious preparation, as contrasted with the pleasant way of life that 'others use'. Milton is thinking of happy people like Diodati, not contemporary poets like Lovelace and Suckling. The muse is 'thankless' because, as the reference to Orpheus was meant to illustrate, she can do nothing to ward off death by way of rewarding her devotee. The 'shepherd's trade', which involves 'uncessant care', is primarily the clerical life, but secondarily Milton's five long years at Hammersmith and Horton, as the little words 'homely' and 'slighted' also tell us. He is here writing about himself alone, not about King; and he is questioning the validity of the course he had chosen to steer.

Why so much emphasis upon preparation? Analysing his own ambitions, he finds a not very satisfactory answer:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days. (70–72)

Had he not confided to Diodati his dreams of immortality? Edward King, too, must have hoped for fame,

But the fair guerdon when we hope to find
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind fury with the abhorred shears
And slits the thin-spun life. (73–76)

The word 'we' brings King back into the picture, and Milton is reminded of heavenly rewards. But the emotional movement is broken as narrative suddenly interrupts the monologue, Apollo addressing the poet personally and reproachfully:

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed. (78–84)

The Renaissance desire for fame is strong in Milton,[79] but fresh reflection has made him realize again that the good man must work, primarily, for God's approval. Here is discovery of old truth, leading to new humility. And here, after eighty-four lines, the poem might have ended.

But the prime question—'Alas, what boots it . . . ?'—had been intellectually, not emotionally, answered. There was no doubting of heavenly rewards, but there was also no doubting the loneliness and tedium of preparation, all of which might lead to nothing. Moreover, the tragic death of King had brought still other matters to Milton's mind. There were, for example, the mysterious circumstances of his drowning:

The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope and all her sisters played.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark . . . (98–100)

Or, at least, so Hippotades is made to testify in the poem, placing the blame on man, not nature. Father Camus, symbolizing the University,[80] comes next and briefly mourns his 'dearest pledge'. Then Milton introduces a subject nearer his heart. Like himself, King had intended to enter the Church, which, at a time like this, could ill afford to lose men of integrity and learning. Among the mourners, therefore, 'last came, and last did go' St. Peter. As founder of the Christian Church (and as the biblical denouncer of false teachers), he had stern words to speak:

How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
Enow of such as for their bellies' sake
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
Of other care they little reckoning make
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast
And shove away the worthy bidden guest. (113–18)

Here, it must be understood, Milton's use of pastoral imagery leans upon another tradition, the Christian conception of the Good Shepherd and His sheep. The transition (aided by any recollection of Virgil's fourth Eclogue) is easy and natural, but the reader must be alert to one considerable difference. In the purely *literary* convention the imagery is purposefully vague;

in Christian usage the imagery is definite and distinct. Was not Milton himself a 'worthy bidden guest' who had been 'Church-outed by the prelates'? He means every word of his condemnation of unworthy pastors:

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw.
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swollen with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.[81] (119–29)

The violence of this indictment is signalled by 'Blind mouths', one of the most startling and unforgettable epithets in the language; and it is underlined by the flesh-crawling harshness of 'Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw'. Reading this line aloud, one should remember John Aubrey's observation that Milton, when satirical, 'pronounced the letter R very hard'.[82]

Eight years later, in publishing his minor poems, Milton added a note to *Lycidas*, calling his reader's attention to the fact that in 1637 he foretold 'the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height.' He referred to the concluding couplet of the speech given St. Peter:

But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more. (130–1)

Countless interpretations have been proposed for this terrible and mysterious symbol of divine retribution,[83] including 'the axe of God's reformation' (a figure used in Milton's first pamphlet, four years after *Lycidas*)[84] and the two-handed avenging sword of Michael in *Paradise Lost*. It is not, of course, necessary to make the lines mean something definite, for their intention is clear enough and their ambiguity is effective. The death of King aroused him to denounce the corrupt clergy and gave him, later, the satisfaction of feeling like a prophet. In *Ad Patrem* he had stressed the prophetic quality of poetry, and here was an illustration which may even have convinced his father.

Although the pastoral tradition offered some precedent, the nineteen-line speech of St. Peter was a deliberate digression. To compensate for it, to restore the normal mood of pastoral, Milton added next a twenty-line catalogue of colourful flowers, beginning self-consciously:

Return, Alpheus; the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams. Return, Sicilian muse,
And call the vales and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues. (132–5)

The flower passage (in the composition of the poem, a happy afterthought) is a pretty artifice that succeeds in its purpose; it contains some of the most musical and richly allusive lines in the entire poem. But Milton has to conclude, as well as begin, with an apology:

For so, to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Wash far away . . . (152–5)

The flowers are strewn on the thoughts of readers, not on 'the laureate hearse' of the drowned Lycidas, whose body was never recovered.

We are ready now for the emotional and spiritual confirmation of the earlier idea of heavenly reward. The poet-shepherd was also a priest-shepherd. We have passed through questioning, and indignation, and assurance of divine justice. We have been comforted with beauty. Our hearts are ready for belief.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky. (165–71)

Immortality, the reward of the dedicated, is the theme; and the music lifts impellingly to express it:

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the saints above
In solemn troops and sweet societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes. (172–81)

The apocalyptic promise again. We have met it before in Milton's poetry; it is nothing new in his thought; but we find it now, more eloquently, more convincingly phrased than ever, rising to the rescue of faith.

*Lycidas* begins and ends with Milton's own problem, as artist and as human being. The last verse-paragraph is a stanza of *ottava rima*, a quiet and personal coda, in which the poet reflects on the experience which his verse records. The monologue concluded, he turns, finally, to simple narrative, offering perspective on all that has been said. It had been a grey and still morning, suiting the mood of elegy. The obscure singer had dared to introduce a variety of strains, enlivening the pastoral with questions. In a world of lengthening shadows the sun had at last gone down, down over the Irish Sea. But the sun would rise again, and tomorrow would be another day.

> Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
> While the still morn went out with sandals grey;
> He touched the tender stops of various quills,
> With eager thought warbling his Doric lay;
> And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
> And now was dropped into the western bay.
> At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue;
> Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new. (186–93)

The epilogue serves a triple purpose: it leaves the reader refreshed, Lycidas rewarded in heaven, and Milton, the poet-priest-shepherd, facing the future with confidence. What were the 'fresh woods, and pastures new'? In general, they were the world of human society, the active world, which the poet, his Horton days nearing an end, was now ready to rejoin.

More immediately and specifically, they were to prove the woods and pastures of sunny Italy. So far as we know, Milton did not take lodgings in one of the Inns of Court, as he had told Diodati he might. The lawsuit against his father was finally dropped, on 1 February 1638, and a few months later Milton was off to the Continent. It is not unlikely that he had in mind his own travels by water when he said of Lycidas:

> Henceforth thou art the genius of the shore,
> In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
> To all that wander in that perilous flood. (183–5)

This idea was conventional enough and, strictly speaking, the lines make King a local god of the Irish Sea, but the additional 'recompense' may have been suggested to Milton—as so much else in the poem was—by his own plans. He intended to visit Sicily, where the pastoral tradition had been born.

Of all Milton's minor poems *Lycidas* has inspired the most superlatives. It has been called, and largely accepted as, the greatest touchstone of poetic appreciation in the English language.[85] To praise it again is to light a candle at noon. Yet candles have sometimes been lit at noon and carried gratefully into dark corners; in a naughty world one can be too timid with tapers. Let me, therefore, venture a few additional comments on *Lycidas*.

For this poem there are several well-marked avenues of appreciation.[86] The one until recently most travelled by critics and editors is perhaps the least inviting to the layman. Critics and editors, possessing a comfortable awareness of literary history, like to regard *Lycidas* as an English triumph in its European genre—a remarkably successful effort to naturalize the pastoral elegy. Knowing Milton's humanistic interest in forms, in *kinds* of poetry, they dwell upon details of the pastoral convention, and ask us to admire the many parallels to be found between *Lycidas* and poems by Theocritus, Moschus (or whoever wrote the *Lament for Bion*), Virgil, Petrarch, Mantuan, and Spenser. Seen from this point of view, *Lycidas* becomes a masterpiece of scholarship wedded to art; and undoubtedly it is. The *scholarly* excellence of Milton's elegy can be appreciated, and marvelled at, by anyone with the interest and patience to study the pastoral tradition.[87] Not incidentally, the scholarly excellence of his poem meant a good deal to Milton; it is not to be dismissed as a pedantic concern. *Lycidas* is a lament for 'a learned friend'; it proclaims that its primary context is European literature.

A second avenue of appreciation also involves a knowledge of literary history. *Lycidas* has been fascinating to critics because it embodies a poetical paradox. Faithfully following one of the most artificial of all verse conventions, it is nevertheless one of the most profoundly *original* poems in the language. No close model or 'source' has ever been found for it. Nothing could be more unreal, or more commonplace, than its basic imaginative assumptions—that student friends are shepherds, that university life is tending a flock, that poems are made on pipes and flutes. On the other hand, nothing could be more unconventional than the art-form in which these pleasant fictions are developed. *Lycidas* is not only unique and conspicuous among the thirty-six poems in the memorial volume to King; it is unique in the verse of its age. Its musical paragraphs, its irregular lines, its amazing mixture of assonance and unrimed lines and irregular rimes—although they doubtless owe something to Milton's reading of Italian poetry[88]—are yet the product of original genius. They would seem eccentric and unforgivable if they were not so successful. They were successful because Milton had experimented with most of them in his earlier verse, and now, putting them together, he knew exactly what he was doing.

This suggests another excellence of Milton's poem which the reader may appreciate without benefit of history. Unless one is disposed to excuse anything if only precedent can be found for it, analysis of *Lycidas* reveals many discordant elements. The monody is supposed to be about Edward King, but is chiefly about Milton. The tone is supposed to be pastoral and pagan, but St. Peter and Christ appear along with Apollo and Jove. Amidst the fauns and flowers is a long attack on the corruption of the English clergy. The nymphs are scolded for not aiding Lycidas, and are then exonerated. Flowers are lovingly gathered for the hearse of Lycidas, although no hearse exists. The poem begins as a monologue, but is several times interrupted by straight narrative. It so happens, however—and the reader can test the fact for himself—that none of these things matters in the least when the poem is felt in its totality. They are successfully, if audaciously, blended. With verbal music as a catalytic agent, they undergo a chemical change, and have separate existence only in analysis like this. They will bother no one who takes the trouble to read *Lycidas* through, aloud.

Of all Milton's minor poems, *Lycidas* has the noblest harmonies. It is metrically and musically *right*. The rhythms are subtly varied; and tonal harmony flows from the separate line through the verse-paragraph, from the paragraph through the poem as a whole. Look closely at almost any point and it will become apparent why *Lycidas* is one of the most musically satisfying poems in English. The 'singing strings' effect which we noticed in the *Vacation Exercise* is used even more successfully near the close of the elegy:

> There entertain him all the saints above
> In solemn troops and sweet societies
> That sing, and singing in their glory move,
> And wipe the tears forever from his eyes. (178–81)

The obvious device of alliteration is deftly joined to tonal harmony in dozens of memorable lines: 'Sleek Panope with all her sisters played' (99). Milton avoids, however, pushing alliteration to Swinburnian excess, as one of the most often misquoted lines in English poetry attests. Readers have a tendency to substitute 'fields' for 'woods' in 'Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.' It is instructive to consider *why* Milton refused alliteration here. A little reflection will show that he emphasizes the words 'fresh' and 'new'—an emphasis which 'fresh fields' would have weakened. Alliteration is Milton's servant in *Lycidas*, never his master. The musical effects are controlled, not only by a careful ear, but also by an artist's mind.

It is necessary to re-emphasize the music of *Lycidas* because a good deal of modern criticism has emphasized other features—the affective connotations of its words and phrases, the extraordinary richness and complexity of its imagery, particularly the archetypal imagery of death and rebirth. The poem's flowers and other vegetation have now been carefully catalogued for us; its water—from the melodious (salty?) tear to the Irish Sea itself—has all been analysed in a critical retort to literal-minded interpretation. The extremes of this generally stimulating explication have even given us Jung-Lycidas, a new Adonis (nowhere alluded to in Milton's poem), a dying god celebrated in a fertility ritual of cyclical rhythms of nature.

In our enthusiasm for rich imagery, and miraculous harmonies, we must not forget that this poem records, not an idea, not a mood, not even an emotion, but a crucial and complicated spiritual experience, deeply personal and profoundly felt. In the last analysis, this is the secret of the sustained tone, the artistic fusion of divers elements. *Lycidas* is a masterpiece because its author, in writing it, mastered a situation. Milton gives us a new sense of mortality ('the thin-spun life'), couched in memorable phrases. He captures in words the finality of death, the hopelessness of retrospect ('for what could that have done?'), the helplessness of loss. His poem ends on a tone of deep tenderness, modulated with infinite skill to a tone of quiet acceptance. When Sara Milton died, in April of 1637, her grieving son composed no elegy which has survived. But seven months later, thinking about the death of an old acquaintance, writing for a Cambridge miscellany and using the comfortable language of a long tradition, the son of Sara found that he could put on paper his sorrow, his fears, his tenderness, his faith.

His elegy was the last poem in a little anthology printed early in 1638.[89] It had only the initials 'J.M.' appended. Shortly before, *Comus* had been published by Lawes with neither the name nor the initials of its author. Was Milton reluctant to appear in print? Was he dissatisfied with his youthful work? Was he, by our standards, hypercritical? So critics and biographers have long assumed, despite the fact that he published under his own name in 1645 not only these but also many inferior productions—despite the fact that he wrote *Lycidas* for a specific volume, and provided for the title page of *Comus* a Latin motto. It would seem more reasonable to interpret this early anonymity as a concession to his father. If the old scrivener had persisted in his avowed dislike of poetry, he could at least respond to a compromise, for in 1638 he financed his son's travels on the Continent.

It is probable that Milton's father approved of *Lycidas* heartily. Here, at last, was a poem which spoke out boldly on an issue of the day. In the elegy was a passage with the fire of an impassioned sermon. If *this* was the kind of verse his son meant to write in the future, then poetry was not so worthless after all, and a Christian ministry could indeed be performed without a pulpit.

The poet celebrated his twenty-ninth birthday in December of 1637. The tour of the Continent was perhaps a birthday present from his father. The journey could not begin, however, until arrangements were complete for the care and comfort of the ageing scrivener. Christopher had recently married Thomasine Webber, daughter of John and Isabel Webber of St. Clement's Churchyard, London.[90] Thomasine could live at Horton (probably she was already there when Milton was considering a move to the Inns of Court), and Christopher could be there too, at least during vacations between terms. A financial worry was lifted when the Cotton lawsuit was dropped on 1 February 1638, and Milton senior was awarded twenty shillings for his expenses.[91] On this same day a loan of £150 was made to Sir John Cope of Hanwell, Oxfordshire, who gave a bond of £300 as security. This was made payable to John Milton junior, who would receive £12 each year in interest so long as the debt remained unpaid.[92] The scrivener decided, moreover, to sell his valuable property south of

Covent Garden, property held in both his name and John's. Their long-time tenant, Sir Matthew Lister, was ready to buy, and in early April the sale was consummated.[93] The continental journey would cost in the neighbourhood of £300. The traveller would take a manservant with him, as a young gentleman should.[94] Henry Lawes managed the business of getting a passport, sending Milton a letter under the hand and seal of Theophilus Howard, Earl of Suffolk, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.[95]

Visiting a friend at nearby Eton, Milton met the elderly and hospitable Provost, Sir Henry Wotton. Later, on 6 April, he ventured to write to Wotton, enclosing a copy of *Comus* and mentioning the projected tour. Wotton's reply, sent to Horton by special messenger on 13 April, was as handsome as might have been expected from an experienced diplomat and former ambassador to Venice. He suggested that the traveller go from Paris to Marseilles and thence by sea to Genoa. He enclosed, however, a note to his friend, Michael Branthwait, in Paris, who could help arrange the Italian itinerary. He was concerned about the safety of a Protestant in Rome, and passed along the advice given him by a canny Italian: 'Thoughts concealed and countenance open will go safely over the whole world.' When Milton returned, he wanted to make his further acquaintance. If he had only realized at their recent meeting that Milton lived so near, he would have invited him over for a meal and more good talk of ancient writers. As for the gift of *Comus*, he had already seen the book and was glad to learn the identity of its author, for he had been ravished by 'a certain Doric delicacy' in the lyric parts of the masque—indeed, had seen nothing comparable to them in English.[96]

Such high praise, from such a distinguished critic (himself a poet), was a passport to distant islands of aspiration. Milton put the precious letter away—to be published seven years later with his collected poems. Exhilarated, he returned to the trifling details of preparation.

# 6. Italy, 1638–1639

It was probably late in April or early in May of 1638 that Milton and his manservant started on their continental tour.[1] The plan was to go through France to Italy, from Naples by boat to Sicily, from Sicily across the blue Mediterranean to Greece, and then back to England. It was to be, in part, a literary pilgrimage, with Florence and Athens as the major shrines to visit. It was to be, as well, an advancement of learning. To Milton the purpose of travel was 'not to learn principles but to enlarge experience, and make wise observation'.[2] Travel was a desirable crown to formal training, for students mature enough to 'deserve the regard and honour of all men where they pass, and the society and friendship of those in all places who are best and most eminent'. He began his journey with high hopes.

The France of Richelieu and Louis XIII held few attractions for Milton. He despised the English youths who had been sent to study under the monsieurs of Paris, and had returned transformed into mimics, apes, and *quelque chose*.[3] He was impatient to reach Italy.[4] When he set foot upon French soil, however, he instantly lost ten days on the calendar; the Gregorian or new-style calendar was in use on the Continent,[5] and May the first in Dover was May the eleventh in Calais. There were other strange sensations: the bother of customs, French money, the oral swiftness of a language chiefly known in books,[6] the awareness of being a foreigner.

The allurements of Paris were notorious, but he made a point of avoiding them.[7] It was enough to know that licence lurked in the dark shadows of Notre Dame. The French were traditionally a generous people, who suffered now from hot persecutions and high taxes,[8] but Milton appears to have sought no deeper insight into the national character. He did, however, make the acquaintance of some Englishmen living abroad. Sir Henry Wotton had given him a letter of introduction to Mr. Michael Branthwait, formerly British agent at Venice, a man well qualified to advise him on his Italian itinerary. He also had letters to the book-loving John Scudamore, Baron Dromore and Viscount of Sligo, who was joint-ambassador with Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester, to the French court. Calling at Scudamore's mansion, he was received with great courtesy by the peer. He did not meet the Earl of Leicester.[9] But by the kindness of Scudamore he met an even greater man, the erudite Hugo Grotius, an exile from his native Holland and now ambassador to France from Christina of Sweden.

Grotius was an international figure, 'of prime note among learned men'[10] as a jurist, theologian, philologist, and historian. Milton was conducted into the presence of the eminent Dutchman by several of Scudamore's retinue. Actually engaging him in conversation was an early fulfilment of one of Milton's ideals of travel, and a glowing augury of adventures to come. What they talked about, we do not know. Perhaps the servile condition of learning on the Continent, and the 'philosophic freedom' of England; perhaps international law, or Grotius's scheme for uniting Protestant churches; perhaps Dr. Theodore Diodati, who had been a fellow student with Grotius at Leyden. The notion is seductive but it is too much to suppose that their talk turned to the great man's youthful tragedy, *Adamus Exul*, although this experience may later have led Milton to read the work.[11]

Some days after this interview, Milton left for Italy,[12] 'the home of humane studies and of all civilized teachings'.[13] Instead of going by way of Marseilles, as Wotton had counselled, he made for Nice, armed with letters from Lord Scudamore to the English merchants on his route, asking them to render all possible assistance to the traveller. The journey through France to the Mediterranean took perhaps two weeks. From Nice he went by coasting packet to Genoa, where he stayed a short time.[14] Basking in the unfamiliar warmth of Italian summer, marvelling at the shortness of the nights,[15] he journeyed on to the flourishing trading port of Leghorn, from Genoa to which, as Wotton had told him, the passage is as diurnal as a Gravesend barge. Now, at last, he was in Tuscany.

Pisa was impressive; but forty-five miles farther inland, up the fabled Arno, was Florence. Milton had always valued Florence above other Italian cities. It had become for him a symbol of elegance, grace, and refinement. He knew its history, and its associations with Dante and Petrarch. He longed to see its proud palaces, its famed churches, its gentle citizens. He was eager to improve his command of the Tuscan dialect, which he greatly admired. In Florence, if anywhere on earth, men were still devoted to the Muses.

He was not disappointed. He viewed, of course, the Duomo, the Campanile, the Pitti Palace, and the other storied sights. Doubtless he went to see the Duke's wild beasts and the Pratolino garden with its water tricks. Very quickly too, he found himself on familiar terms with many Florentines, men eminent for their rank and their learning.[16] He met the brilliant young lawyer, Agostino Coltellini. Small, affable, and only twenty-five, Coltellini had recently gained distinction as the founder of a flourishing private academy or club known as the *Apatisti* or 'the passionless'. The secretary of the academy was a precocious boy of eighteen, Carlo Dati, a prodigy of eloquence and knowledge. Whether it was these two or some others who first discovered the talented Englishman in their midst, Milton soon found himself invited to meet the Tuscan men of letters, and eventually to attend sessions of the *Apatisti*. The president of the academy was a distinguished older scholar, Benedetto Fioretti, celebrated as a grammarian and a critic of poetry, and now almost sixty. Among the lesser members whom Milton met and long remembered were Pietro Frescobaldi, Antonio Francini, and Valerio Chimentelli.[17]

This was the city of the famous Florentine Academy, and the *Della Crusca*, but it was the smaller, private academies which most impressed Milton. He had known nothing like them before. He heartily approved of their combination of sociability and encouragement of polite letters. He liked their rule of requiring some proof of wit and learning from everyone in attendance. He liked the surprise with which they received his own first contributions, probably pieces composed at Cambridge and now recited from memory; and he liked the enthusiastic applause which followed.[18]

He met Jacobo Gaddi, founder of another academy, the *Svogliati* or 'the Disgusted'. He met Vincenzo, the natural son of the great Galileo, and Antonio Malatesti, the poet. He met Dr. Benedetto Bonmatthei, who belonged to both the *Apatisti* and the *Svogliati*, and was reputed one of the greatest scholars in Florence. Bonmatthei, he learned, was an authority on the Tuscan dialect and was even now putting the finishing touches on his *magnum opus*, a new grammar. Talking to the elderly priest in his most careful Tuscan, Milton begged him to add a short chapter on pronunciation to his book, for the benefit of foreigners. It would be helpful too if he published information on the best Tuscan authors—below the obviously great, of course—in the realm of tragedy, comedy, letters or dialogues, and history. Florentines might need no assistance on such matters, but for English admirers of Tuscan literature, like himself, there was a gap in scholarship to be filled.[19]

Milton felt so keenly about his proposed additions to the *Della Lingua Toscana* of Bonmatthei that he wrote him a long letter on 31 August/10 September, elaborating the arguments already expressed. He wrote in Latin instead of Italian, so that his remarks would have more fluency and force. Although properly modest about his comparative ignorance of Tuscan language and literature, he nevertheless made clear his right, as a linguist and student of letters, to offer criticism. He also explained his personal conviction that the refinement of written and spoken language has a direct relationship to the strength of a society.

On 6/16 September, with Bonmatthei probably present, Milton attended a meeting of the *Svogliati* at Gaddi's house in the Piazza Madonna, and read a poem in Latin hexameters. The gentlemen of the academy pronounced it *molto erudita*.[20]

While Milton found his Florentine friends stimulating and delightful, they, in turn, found their visitor from the North an extraordinary person. Some of them disliked him on account of his severe morality.[21] But Francini and young Dati presented him with written tributes which, despite their Italian extravagance, reveal the qualities in Milton that most impressed them. Both speak of his amazing skill at languages; Francini marvels that this foreigner knows not only Tuscan, but also Spanish, French, Latin, and Greek. Both speak of his erudition and his memory. Both mention his desire for glory as a man of letters.

Dati and Francini did not know it, but Milton's ideas of glory and his ambitions as a man of letters were developing a new clarity as he travelled under the clear skies of Italy. As he enlarged his experience, he was discovering himself. He was also storing up memories, of 'the top of Fiesole', of 'autumnal leaves that strow the brooks / In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades / High overarched embower'.[22]

Milton remained in Florence about two months. He was certainly there during part of August and September of 1638, and he may have arrived late in July.[23] Leaving such pleasant companions was difficult, but there were many sights still to be seen; ahead of him were Rome, Sicily, and the glories of ancient Greece.

His next stop was Siena. And then, Rome. In Rome and in Naples, earlier travellers had warned, trouble was most likely in store for any visiting Protestants. The Jesuits gathered evidence on strangers; even the innkeepers were spies and informers, it was said. Standing at last in St. Peter's, Milton must have felt it to be an architectural blasphemy, a perversion of true worship, a cathedral more fit for devils:

pilasters round
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid
With golden architrave; nor did there want
Cornice or frieze, with bossy sculptures graven;
The roof was fretted gold. Not Babylon
Nor great Alcairo such magnificence
Equalled in all their glories, to enshrine
Belus or Serapis their gods . . .
. . . Th' ascending pile
Stood fixed her stately height, and straight the doors
Opening their brazen folds discover wide
Within, her ample spaces, o'er the smooth
And level pavement; from the archèd roof
Pendant by subtle magic many a row
Of starry lamps and blazing cressets fed
With naphtha and asphaltus yielded light
As from a sky.[24]

The other Rome, the monument of classical antiquity, his scholarship had richly equipped him to enjoy. Viewing the ruins, in his mind's eye he could see the ancient grandeur. On each side of the banks of the Tiber

an imperial city stood,
With towers and temples proudly elevate
On seven small hills, with palaces adorned,
Porches and theatres, baths, aqueducts,
Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs,
Gardens and groves presented to his eyes.
. . . there the Capitol thou seest,
Above the rest lifting his stately head
On the Tarpeian rock, her citadel
Impregnable, and there Mount Palatine
Th' imperial palace, compass huge, and high
The structure, skill of noblest architects,
With gilded battlements, conspicuous far,
Turrets and terraces, and glittering spires.
Many a fair edifice besides, . . .
. . . pillars and roofs
Carved work, the hand of famed artificers
In cedar, marble, ivory or gold. (*P.R.* IV. 33–60)

Milton stayed in Rome about two months, admiring the antiquities and also enjoying the society of fresh acquaintances, 'learned and superior men'. He probably carried letters of introduction from his Florentine friends, who had noticed his eagerness to encounter literary men on his travels.[25] He met another intellectual prodigy, younger than himself, Alessandro Cherubini.[26] He proudly accepted a complimentary couplet from someone named Selvaggi.[27] On 20/30 October he and his servant actually dined in the English Jesuit College, along with three fellow countrymen, a Dr. Holding of Lancaster, Sir Nicholas Fortescue, and (Patrick ?) Cary, brother of Lucius, Viscount Falkland.[28] Occasionally he encountered another young Englishman on his travels, Thomas Gawen.[29]

At Rome, too, Milton met a versifier named Giovanni Salzilli. This person, who has long since been forgotten,[30] presented Milton with a eulogistic epigram, ranking him above Homer, Virgil, and Tasso. Shortly afterwards Salzilli became ill. Milton was prompted to send his condolences and wishes for a speedy recovery in the form of a Latin poem in scazontic or 'limping' metre. The poem not only refers modestly to the extravagant epigram, which its recipient liked so well that he actually printed it seven years later, but also returns the compliment in somewhat less hyperbolic language. The Tiber, calmed by the singing of Salzilli, will forget to flood, and the ghost of Numa will marvel at such elegant verse. And so on. The Englishman clearly considered Salzilli a 'learned and superior' man, and his own ghost must marvel at our futile efforts to discover much about the Roman poet. *Ad Salsillum* is a piece of poetical back-scratching, rare with Milton but illustrating his quick response to Italian effusiveness.

Travelling on to the Spanish province of Naples, the port of embarkation for Spanish-controlled Sicily—Naples with its 'hill not far whose grisly top / Belched fire and rolling smoke'[31]—Milton had an experience that apparently impressed him more than his visit with Grotius (or subsequent visit with Galileo). He met a link with the past, a man who had been the friend of two of Italy's greatest poets, Tasso and Marini. Giovanni Battista Manso, marquis of Villa and lord of Bisaccio and Panca, was a great patron of learning and letters. Wealthy, descended of an ancient and illustrious family, he was himself an author, but his prime claim to remembrance was the kindness he had shown to impoverished artists and poets. Long before Milton was born, Manso had befriended the wretched author of *Gerusalemme Conquistata*; and, while Milton was still a schoolboy at St. Paul's, the famous Marini had found encouragement and protection at Manso's villa. These poets, and countless others, had celebrated their generous patron in verse. He was a personage, a living symbol of Italian literature. The illustrious Tasso had addressed his *De Amicitia* to this man.

Milton was introduced to Manso by an eremite friar with whom he had made the journey from Rome. The aged marquis was flatteringly attentive to the young traveller, conducting him round the city, taking him to the palace of the viceroy (to see, no doubt, the two banqueting houses, the collection of arms and armour, the gardens, secret fountains, and delicate cages of birds), and more than once calling upon him at his lodgings. To Milton this seemed more than common courtesy. The enthusiastic praise his poetry had received in Florence, and again in Rome, had made him unusually alive to the significance of events. Was history perchance repeating itself? Tasso, Marini—and now, Milton?

At Naples the young traveller, eager for news from home, looked up the English merchants. The letters he received are now lost, but we may guess their contents. We know for certain that at Naples he heard most depressing news of the imminence of civil war in England.[32] He probably heard, too, that his brother Christopher and his wife were expecting a baby, and that the old scrivener was elated at the prospect of another grandchild. He probably heard of the death of his cousin, Sarah Jeffrey, in August. It was in Naples, too, that he probably first heard of the disaster which had struck the Diodati family.[33] Isabel and Philadelphia, sister-in-law and sister of Charles, were dead. And Charles himself—Charles was dead, dead and already buried in the church of St. Anne, Blackfriars.

John wanted to go home. If his fellow citizens would soon be actually fighting for their liberty on English soil, it was base for him to be travelling abroad at his ease, even for the improvement of his mind. The long-anticipated voyage to Sicily and Greece suddenly lost its savour. Impulsively he changed his plans. He decided to return to England, in part by the way he had come, visiting Rome and Florence once more. He realized, with a pang, that he wanted to see his Roman and Florentine friends again. From Florence he could make a sentimental journey to Lucca, where the ancestors of Charles had lived. On the way home he could also visit Geneva, where Charles's uncle, the learned Giovanni Diodati, was professor of divinity. Sicily and Greece he might see another day.

Before leaving Naples he was anxious to let Manso know, somehow, that he had once more offered hospitality to a poet. He composed, therefore, one of the most Virgilian and most revealing of all his Latin verses. His lengthy (100 hexameters) and self-conscious *Mansus* was an effort, probably successful, to show the friend of Tasso and Marini that England, too, was productive of noble verse.[34] It was an effort the more remarkable as one of the things which, as Milton later said of his Italian compositions, 'I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them.'[35]

*Mansus* begins, inevitably, with a recognition of its subject's patronage of poets. He is a modern Gallus and Maecenas; he is also a biographer, a commemorator, of the great. In the name of Apollo and of Clio the muse of history, Milton wishes him health and long life. Modestly, Milton identifies himself as a poet: 'You, who are so kind, will not despise a foreign Muse, which, though poorly nourished under the frozen Bear, has recently ventured to fly through Italian cities. Methinks in the dim shadows of night I, too, have heard the swans singing on our own river.' Chaucer, he recalls, had also visited Italy. Milton is in a mood to notice parallels. He informs Manso that the English 'are no uncultivated people, useless to Apollo'. Even in the days of old, there were Druids who sang the deeds of heroes. In England, Tasso and Marini are known, and there Manso will be known also. In the opening hexameters of the poem Milton had calmly promised to make his host more famous. He now speaks openly of his own epic aspirations: 'if ever I recall in song our native kings, and Arthur waging war even beneath the earth, or if ever I proclaim the high-souled heroes of the Round Table which their bond made invincible, and (if only the spirit be with me!) break the Saxon phalanxes with the British shock of war . . .'

Having revealed this much, he concludes the poem with sixteen lines so unexpected and so charged with personal feeling that Manso may have puzzled over their significance. As before in *Lycidas*, Milton imagines himself dying. But the spiritual dilemma of *Lycidas* is absent, as already resolved; he imagines his death at the end of a long and productive life. Present now is another question, another cry: 'Oh, if my Fate might give me such a friend, a man who understands how to honour the devotees of Phoebus . . . that friend would stand with tear-filled eyes beside my bed. I would be content if I might say to him as he stood there, "Take me into your care." He would place my limbs, relaxed by death, gently in their grave. Perhaps he might even cause my face to be carved in marble, and wreathe my head with Paphian myrtle and Parnassian laurel. So I should rest in peace.' There is more. From this note of brooding and pathetic dependence, this wistful lingering over imagined obsequies, the poem rises in its last four lines to a confident statement of happiness in the hereafter. . . .

As Milton prepared to return to Rome and begin his homeward journey, the English merchants in Naples thought it necessary to warn him. Their letters had brought them the rumour that the Jesuits in Rome had laid a plot for the young traveller, if ever he should return to the Eternal City. He had been too outspoken on the subject of religion. Milton recalled the advice which the travel-wise Wotton had given him: 'Thoughts concealed and countenance open will go safely over the whole world.' He remembered, too, how the courteous Manso had gravely apologized for showing him no more attention; it was what he wished above all things, but it was not in his power in Naples, since the visitor had not thought it proper to be more guarded on the point of religion. As a token of his qualified esteem he had presented Milton with a pointed distich: 'If your mind, form, grace, features, and manners were equalled by your creed, then, I swear, you would be no Angle but a very angel.'[36]

Yet Milton's conscience was clear. His Florentine friends had tolerated his freedom of speech (had perhaps even been titillated by it). Many Italians had told him that the Jesuits were corrupters of youth and of good learning.[37] Besides, he had developed his own rule of behaviour, and he saw no reason for changing it. As a guest in Roman Catholic countries he would never *begin* a conversation on religion, but if asked about his belief he would proudly declare it. Whatever the consequences, he would not deny his faith. Even in the city of the Pope, if anyone attacked him, he would defend openly the true religion.[38]

And so, defiantly, he returned to Rome. He was there for nearly two months more—in which time he visited the Vatican, and was charmed by a cardinal.[39]

Milton went to the Vatican for the purpose of meeting Lucas Holstenius, a native of Hamburg, now a Catholic and a naturalized Roman.[40] The scholarship of Holstenius was famed, and it was probably Cherubini who suggested to Milton that he should call upon the great man and, perhaps, be shown the wonders of the Vatican library. Holstenius received his young visitor with the utmost courtesy, admitted him to the library, let him examine his notes upon some Greek manuscripts, watched him marvel at the literary treasures still unpublished to the world, and, as a parting gift and gesture of goodwill, presented him with two copies of Greek texts which he himself had edited.[41] Milton was overwhelmed. He agreed eagerly when Holstenius asked a favour in return. Since the traveller was stopping next at Florence, would he visit the Laurentian library and copy certain portions of a certain Medicean codex? It would be of great assistance to some research in progress. Pleased by this recognition of his own scholarly abilities, Milton promised a prompt execution of such an important commission.

Among his other offices of distinction Holstenius was secretary and librarian to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who was not only prime minister of Rome but also chief counsellor to his uncle, Pope Urban VIII. A few days after his visit to the Vatican, Milton attended a public musical entertainment[42] given, with truly Roman magnificence, by the Cardinal. To his complete surprise he was met at the door of the theatre by his illustrious host, who, singling him out and seeming to know who he was, had welcomed him with special honour.[43] Holstenius must have told his great patron of Milton's presence in the city, and Milton glowed with gratitude for such manifest esteem.

The next day he went to the Casa Barberini to pay his respects to the Cardinal, and was granted an audience of flattering length. His Eminence was the soul of courtesy, and made clear to his guest his humble desire to encourage all the liberal arts. As the self-appointed protector of English interests at the Papal Court, he was especially happy to greet English men of letters who were visiting Rome. When the interview ended, Milton was walking on air. While such a man lived, Italy would not miss the Este, Farnese, and Medici families as patrons of art and learning. Here was a prince, not haughty, not arrogant, but truly magnanimous. Milton hoped for nothing from the favour of a Roman Catholic cardinal, but he had an experience never to be forgotten.[44]

While in Rome he also heard the singing of the famous Leonora Baroni, and he reacted like a Roman.[45] It was fashionable to write verses in praise of this diva's voice; in fact, a polylingual volume of such tributes was to be published within the year.[46] Whether or not Milton knew of this collection in prospect, he joined in the chorus with three elegiac epigrams, *Ad Leonoram*. They are extravagant in the best Italian manner—God speaks only through the music of her voice, which could have cured the madness of Tasso; she is Neapolitan Parthenope brought alive. Milton was not, of course, writing love poems; there is no reason to suppose that he ever spoke a word to Leonora. He was simply, as a travelling representative of English letters, doing the polite thing and exhibiting the social side of his Muse.[47]

In March 1639 he was back in Florence. It was almost like coming home. He had been gone only four or five months, but his friends there, if surprised to see him, were ostensibly glad to have his company again. The gentlemen of the *Svogliati*, whetting their jaded appetites, invited him to three successive meetings of their academy—on 7/17, 14/24, and 21/31 March—and at the first two meetings he delighted the nine or so members present[48] by reading Latin verses of his own composition, perhaps the Leonora epigrams and the poems to Manso and Salzilli. No doubt he met the *Apatisti* as well, and he may have visited still other private academies (there were some twenty in Florence). He told his friends of the commission given him by Holstenius, and was disappointed to learn from them that the Laurentian library required special permission for copying manuscripts and would not even allow readers to bring a pen to the tables. They suggested to him that Giovanni Battista Doni, now in Rome but expected soon in Florence as public lecturer in Greek, could easily secure whatever information Holstenius needed. Confronted with an apparent impossibility, Milton explained the situation in a letter from Florence dated 19/29 March, thanking the librarian for his many courtesies to the traveller and asking that his profound respects be conveyed to his Eminence the Cardinal.[49]

Time moved as swiftly as the Arno after March rains while the young Englishman, for a second time, luxuriated in the learned talk and open admiration of his Tuscan acquaintances. He developed a special fondness for Francini and for the precocious Dati. Antonio Malatesti presented him with the manuscript of a sequence of fifty sonnets, entitled *La Tina, Equivoci Rusticali*, and dedicated by the author to 'Signor Giovanni Milton, nobile Inghlese'. This gift put to the test both Milton's linguistic skill and his sense of humour. The poems had somewhat improper double meanings. We do not know their recipient's response; but he took the manuscript back to England with him, and years later sent cordial greetings to Malatesti in a letter written to Dati.[50]

Leaving this congenial society for a few days, he made the pilgrimage to Lucca which he had planned in remembrance of Charles Diodati.[51] By descent Charles, too, was a Tuscan, and it was painfully easy to recall his lively mind and gentle spirit, there in the upper valley of the Arno.

During either his first or his second stay in Florence, Milton had another memorable encounter with an international celebrity. 'There it was', he reported later, 'that I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought.'[52] It may have been the great scientist's son, Vincenzo Galilei, who made possible this interview, or it may have been Carlo Dati, who had been Galileo's pupil, or some other Florentine acquaintance.[53] Galileo lived but a short distance outside the city, at Arcetri, in a pleasant villa named *Il Gioiello* or 'the Gem'. Although not literally imprisoned, he was still under official condemnation and his activities were limited. Furthermore, blindness had completed the work of the Inquisition and he could barely see the young stranger from England who had come to do him homage. The old astronomer could look back on seventy-five stirring years, but never again through his marvellous telescope view the moon

> At evening from the top of Fesole,
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
> Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.[54]

In the invigorating sunshine of Italian culture there were ugly shadows. Excepting perhaps the exiled Grotius, Galileo was the most dramatic illustration in Milton's experience of the evils of censorship. Yet in Florence Galileo had many followers, and throughout Italy there was murmuring against the suppression of knowledge. Some of the more audacious confided their fears to the visitor from England, and five years later Milton reported to his countrymen what he had learned: 'I could recount what I have seen and heard in other countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes; when I have sat among their learned men, for that honour I had, and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian. . . . And though I knew that England then was groaning loudest under the prelatical yoke, nevertheless I took it as a pledge of future happiness, that other nations were so persuaded of her liberty.'[55]

Travel intensified Milton's patriotism. He found himself, probably to his surprise, regarded as a visiting representative of English letters, and the sensation was not unpleasing; it even aroused the missionary spirit in him. There was an English culture worth respecting. There were English stories worth celebrating in song. And English, as a language, was a fit medium for immortal verse. This last thought, which he did not express in *Mansus*, was doubtless born of the same patriotic impulse, stirred by Italian ignorance and admiration. A little more than two years later, speaking of the Italian journey's effect upon his poetical ambitions, he concluded: 'If I were certain to write [for posterity] . . . there ought no regard be sooner had than to God's glory by the honour and instruction of my country. For which cause, and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latins, I applied myself . . . to fix all the industry and art I could unite *to the adorning of my native tongue* . . . to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this island, in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion—with this over and above of being a Christian—might do for mine: not caring to be once named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British Islands as my world . . .'[56]

Implicit in such a statement, of course, is a clear conviction of poetic calling. Beyond doubt the Italian experience brought a turning-point in Milton's development as an artist. He himself recognized and explained the important difference between his youthful and later attitudes toward composition: 'After I had from my first years by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, whom God recompense, been exercised to the tongues and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools, it was found that whether aught was imposed me by them that had the overlooking, or betaken to of mine own choice, in English or other tongue, prosing or versing (but chiefly this latter), the style by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.' So much for the St. Paul's and Cambridge periods. 'But much latelier in the private academies of Italy, whither I was favoured to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout . . . met with acceptance above what was looked for, and other things which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps, I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.'[57]

Although the Hammersmith and Horton days had seen him confident of poetical ability, the Italian experience confirmed and clarified this confidence, so that 'an inward prompting' could grow daily within him. After Italy, Milton knew what he had to do. In a sense, travel limited and confined his hitherto vague ambitions. He returned home content to be only the greatest of English poets.

After another two months in Florence, Milton reluctantly said farewell to his many friends and resumed his homeward journey. His emotions on leaving the city by the Arno returned to haunt him in later years, when he felt acutely his lack of congenial companionship.[58] If modern Italian literature was a poor thing compared with the glorious past, if 'nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian', even so there was rare stimulation in learned talk and there was encouragement in the society of persons who cared about liberal studies. Except occasionally, with a few individuals like the lost Diodati, Milton had known nothing like it before. He departed sadly for the colder intellectual climate of England.

Having sacrificed the voyage to Greece and determined to visit Geneva, he added some famous cities of northern Italy to his revised itinerary. Crossing the Apennines, he passed through Bologna and Ferrara, and journeyed on to the republic of Venice. Here he spent a month in sightseeing. Here, too, he shipped to England the books he had collected in Italy. A year or so later, his nephew, ten-year-old Edward Phillips, saw these books and long remembered them as 'curious and rare'. He was particularly impressed by 'a chest or two of choice music-books of the best Masters flourishing about that time in Italy, namely' Luca Marenzio, Claudio Monteverdi, Orazio Vecchi, Antonio Cifra, Don Carlo Gesualdo the Prince of Venosa, and several others.[59] While in Venice, Milton may have met the aged Monteverdi, who was organist at St. Mark's and master of the choir. Doubtless he also visited San Cassiano, the new opera-house.

Now, passing through Verona and Milan,[60] Milton crossed the 'skyey cliffs of the snow-clad Alps'[61] into Switzerland and came to Lake Leman and Geneva. He was there, certainly, before 31 May/10 June, when he copied into the autograph album of Count Camillo Cerdogni two lines from *Comus*—'if Virtue feeble were, Heaven itself would stoop to her'—and an appropriate quotation from Horace: 'I change my sky but not my mind when I cross the sea.'[62]

Visiting 'that envied city', Geneva, the seat of Protestant theology, was a kind of spiritual homecoming for Milton. He highly admired its encouragement of learning, its worship and study of a purer religion. He admired, too, the Swiss republic, surrounded on all sides by powerful and aggressive neighbours and yet successful in guarding its liberty through the years. Geneva symbolized for him the virtues of prudence, moderation, constancy, and equality.[63] Its sober society was in striking and welcome contrast to that of Italian cities, where vice was practised openly, where courtesans were honoured by all men with respectful salutations. (In Naples, it was said, there were 30,000 courtesans in a population of 300,000.) Fifteen years later, remembering Geneva, he was proud to 'call upon God to witness, that in all those places where there is so much licence, I lived pure and untouched of all defilement and profligate behaviour, having it ever in mind that, if I could escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not escape the eyes of God.'[64]

He early called upon the distinguished Giovanni Diodati, and together they mourned the untimely death of Charles. For a while he saw Professor Diodati daily. Walking to his house,[65] he looked upon scenes which Charles, too, must have noticed and enjoyed when he was a student at the Academy, less than eight years before.[66] After so many months among Catholics, Milton found it a relief to be able to talk of politics and religion to sympathetic ears. His later, though brief, endorsement of Presbyterianism may have owed something to the emotions experienced upon reaching the home of Calvinistic theocracy.[67]

On the return journey through France, Milton had time to indulge his reminiscences. He had been travelling for a year and about three months. There was no calculating the future value of his experiences. He had been face to face with some of the greatest men of his time, Grotius and Galileo, Holstenius and Manso, Diodati and Cardinal Barberini. He had, by the grace of God, survived personal danger, and, by God's will, had lost a dear friend. He would no longer be the same John Milton. There were countless things that he would long remember: the ruins of buried Rome; a mountebank imitating the voices of animals for the amusement of a crowd; the empirics, perfumers, and hawkers, noisily vending their wares in the streets of Venice; the mangling of British names in the mouths of foreigners.[68] He had polished his skill at spoken languages, and had developed or confirmed a decided preference for the Italian pronunciation of Latin, especially in the vowels. He understood now that Englishmen, in the cold air of the North, did not open their mouths wide enough to grace a southern tongue, but spoke 'exceeding close and inward'.[69] Hereafter he would know better. On the other hand, he was sure that there were things English worth imitation by other countries, and that continental nations would do well to send more of their youths to England for their breeding.[70]

Florence he would never forget. What a man he had felt himself there, basking in the genial sunlight of Tuscan enthusiasm![71] If his natural endowments proved 'not the worst for two and fifty degrees of northern latitude', if the cold climate of his native land did not dampen the wings of poetry,[72] he would soon justify the generous compliments that were still, pleasantly, ringing in his ears.

Although, at thirty, he still thought of himself as young, and as needing further preparation, the Italian journey matured Milton, increasing his self-confidence and self-knowledge, letting him see himself for the first time as a sophisticated, worldly citizen of the republic of letters, one of the intellectual élite of Europe. It had also strengthened his character, putting his Protestantism severely on trial while giving it a new and valuable perspective. He had observed for himself the opulence and corruption of the Church of Rome, and yet had confirmed his opinion that Italy was the true seat of civilization. Indeed, without compromising his faith in any way, he had been on the friendliest of terms with a great many Catholics. This experience had compensated somewhat for the years of loneliness at Hammersmith and at Horton. How hard those years had been on him, and how much he relished the friendships made in Italy, were evidenced by his revisiting Rome and Florence. Losing his oldest friend, he had hurried back to new ones. Now he was returning to England resolved to learn more about the history of his own country, and to write in English for the glory of England. Italy had given him both an immediate and a long-range purpose, clarifying his plans for his career. It had made him proud to sign himself Joannes Miltonius, *Anglus*.

# PART THREE

# CITIZENSHIP

# 7. London, 1639–1642

MILTON returned to an England precariously at peace. The Episcopal war with the Scots, formally declared late in January, had ended ingloriously on 18 June 1639 with the pacification of Berwick. No battles had been fought. Facing the Scottish army on the banks of the Tweed, King Charles had realized that he lacked sufficient force to punish his rebellious subjects. He returned to London in early August with intentions not difficult to guess.

Even before Milton sailed for France, there had been much excited talk about the news from the outlandish nation to the North. In March of 1638 Scotsmen were enthusiastically subscribing to a Covenant which breathed defiance to Laud and to all episcopal aggression. English Puritans suddenly took heart, and some of them, for the first time, began to think of Presbyterianism as a definite and attainable consummation of their hopes. To the King, however, the Covenanters were a threat, not only to the established Church, but to monarchy itself. He sent the Marquess of Hamilton on three separate missions to Scotland—in May, August, and September—to treat with the Presbyterians, and to gain time. Negotiations only aggravated covenanting zeal, and the King was compelled to allow a national assembly to meet at Glasgow on 21 November 1638. When the assembly continued its deliberations in open defiance of a subsequent proclamation dissolving it, everyone knew that war was inevitable. This was the news that had greeted Milton in far-away Naples, when he had talked with the English merchants and read his letters from home.

The returning traveller found people still discussing the Scottish business. Disloyalty to the King was a sobering matter. Civil war, and much bloodshed, had been narrowly averted. But Episcopacy had really been abolished in the neighbouring kingdom, and Presbyterianism was a victorious fact. If it could happen in Scotland it might also be achieved in England. The Scots had even won the right to a Parliament, and there had been no Parliament in England for ten long years. These Covenanters were enemies to the Crown, and no doubt were strange creatures, but they had struck a blow for freedom which many a loyal Englishman almost envied.

Though Milton was of course interested in these problems of public concern, for a time at least his own problems, and visits with relatives and friends, largely absorbed his attention. Now thirty, he intended to set up a separate establishment, preferably in London, and possibly in one of the Inns of Court, where he could both continue the studies interrupted by the Italian journey and begin his career as an influential man of letters. First, however, he returned to Horton. His mother was no longer there to welcome him, and, after so long an absence, his recollection of her death must have had a special poignancy. His father was still there, however, and Thomasine, with the sad story to tell of the infant son whom she and Christopher had buried last 26 March.[1] John was expected, we may be sure, to give a full account of his travels, as well as of his plans for the future.

In London there were various persons to visit, and at the church of St. Anne, Blackfriars, there was another grave to be viewed in silence and a choking rush of memories, the grave where Charles Diodati lay, insensible to tears. We know for certain that Milton also saw his small nephews, John and Edward Phillips, now eight and nine years old. They were ripe for learning, and if they could live with their uncle for a time, he could supervise their studies during his leisure hours. Such, at least, seems to have been the rather extraordinary suggestion made by their stepfather, Thomas Agar, and their mother Anne (if she was still living). Milton was willing enough to undertake the experiment, but he had no intention of returning to Horton to live, and in such troubled and uncertain days a suitable house in London might be difficult to find. When he made inquiries, the situation proved discouraging, and he was forced to take lodgings, temporarily, in the house of a tailor named Russell, in St. Bride's Churchyard near Fleet Street. It was decided that little John Phillips would board there with him, being entirely under his charge and care, while Edward would come, perhaps daily, for instruction.[2]

This arrangement, begun in the autumn of 1639 or early in 1640, was not really satisfactory, but it seems to have been continued for almost a year. The surroundings were noisy (after the quiet of Horton); the quarters were cramped, with insufficient space for books; and there was not enough privacy. Nevertheless, Milton returned eagerly to his programme of study, and soon was absorbed in his reading. His interest in Church history largely satisfied, he was determined, now, to learn more about the history of his own country. Much in his thoughts was an epic on the 'noble achievements' of England from the coming of the Trojans under Brutus to the time of Arthur and his knights. Stimulated and encouraged by his experiences in Italy, he began making ambitious literary plans. Devoting part of each day to the education of the Phillips boys, he managed to make substantial progress in his own mastery of Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Camden, Holinshed, Speed, Stow, and other British historians. As he took notes, he found Holinshed especially rewarding.

One day—we may never know precisely when—he was emboldened to begin the epic on King Arthur. The effort was abortive; after getting on paper a number of verses, he found that he simply could not sustain the tone. Nevertheless, he was pleased and excited over making a start—confident that he could achieve, in time, sufficient momentum to continue. Inevitably his thoughts turned to the absent Diodati. It was still difficult to believe that Charles was dead. There were so many things he had intended to tell his old companion, his most trusted confidant, and now he needed to discuss his new ambitions as a poet. Whom could he confide in, now that Charles was gone? And he who had promised immortality to Lycidas—how could he find words for this greater grief?

It was eleven nights and a day after beginning an epic, a year and some months after Diodati's death, that Milton finally composed his *Epitaphium Damonis*.[3] Having given himself time to reflect, he conceived of his elegy as serving two worthy purposes: a memorial to Charles, and an expression of gratitude to his Italian hosts. He wrote, therefore, in Latin, not English. When the poem was completed, he had it privately printed, and sent copies to appropriate persons at home and abroad.[4]

Like *Lycidas*, the *Epitaphium Damonis* is a pastoral elegy. Into it Milton poured the same scholarship, the same understanding of pastoral conventions, which he had drawn upon before. Again he used the pretty fiction of fellow shepherds tending their sheep; again he invoked the Sicilian muse (the Sicily still unvisited!), and peopled his verse with nymphs. Much of what I have already said about *Lycidas* as a particular *kind* of poem applies with equal relevance to the *Epitaphium Damonis*. But there are differences which deserve our special attention.

When in 1645 Milton published *Lycidas* and the *Epitaphium Damonis* in the same volume, he identified Damon as Charles Diodati in both the poem itself and a prefatory note, but he nowhere identified Lycidas as Edward King. The fact is significant. The dominant emotion of the earlier poem is personal uncertainty; the dominant emotion of the later is personal loss. The *Epitaphium Damonis* is a moving tribute to friendship. The character and personality of King do not emerge in *Lycidas*, because Milton was chiefly concerned with parallels, and was probably not an intimate friend of his subject. The character and personality of Diodati are celebrated throughout the later elegy, because Milton was missing the familiar virtues of an old friend. We learn that Charles was his faithful confidant, his favourite companion. We learn that Charles was not only chaste and virtuous, possessed of a sweet simplicity, but also gay and witty, a delightful conversationalist. We hear about his medical interests and more general knowledge; we hear also of his laughter and his charm.

Critics have noticed that the descriptions of pastoral life in the *Epitaphium Damonis* are more explicit and detailed than those in *Lycidas*. There is a reason for this. Milton knew Edward King at Cambridge, and the necessity for putting student activities into pastoral terms involved generality and vagueness. On the other hand, Milton had actually visited Diodati in the country, and Charles had visited him at Horton. The rural background of the second elegy, therefore, is partly genuine, as the mention of definite rivers and regions indicates.[5] The poem is also full of people, some of them—Dati, Francini, Manso—called by their real names. *Lycidas* was an expression of loneliness, of brooding in solitude; it was a product of the Horton period, when Milton was restless and suddenly uncertain. By contrast, the *Epitaphium Damonis*—despite its poignant expression of loss—is a social poem, an appropriate tribute to the gregarious Diodati. A dozen persons are mentioned in it under pastoral names, and whether they were all real or not, they imply that Milton had made the transition to fresh woods and pastures new. After his visit to Italy, he was no longer a recluse.

The *Epitaphium Damonis* is a slightly longer poem than *Lycidas*[6] and, while it belongs to the same tradition, it employs a few pastoral devices which had not been used in the earlier elegy. Milton calls himself 'Thyrsis', the name he had given Henry Lawes in *Comus*, and the name which Theocritus had adopted for the mourning shepherd in his *Lament for Daphnis*. This ancient elegy was much in Milton's mind. He refers to Daphnis in his opening line, and later (31) promises to make Diodati famous 'next after Daphnis'. He also employs the refrain, a familiar unifying device which he had ignored in *Lycidas*, but which occurs in the *Lament for Daphnis*. The reader who wishes to study Milton's classical models had better begin with the first idyll of Theocritus.

A modern scholar has observed that, whereas Milton transfused *Lycidas* with the epic qualities of his temperament, he did not do so in his second pastoral elegy. The *Epitaphium Damonis* is more strictly in the mood of the Sicilian poets, with little spiritual kinship to the *Bucolics* of Virgil. The monotonous refrain is symptomatic of a too careful imitation (perhaps with Italian critics in mind), for 'lambs that have to be liturgically shooed away seventeen times are either unusually hungry or unusually inquisitive'.[7] Unlike the critic who made this amusing protest, Milton was not counting sheep; but he was perhaps caught napping, or at least wool-gathering.

Parts of the poem, however, even in rough translation, are very fine and very revealing. The tone of the whole is a strange blending of grief and confidence. He can assure Diodati that his good name 'will endure and long be held in esteem' because Diodati 'had a poet for a friend': 'These rewards for you are certain, Damon; you shall have them. But what will become of me? . . . To whom can I entrust my heart? Who will teach me to forget my worries and shorten the long night with pleasant conversation? . . . Who will replace your charms, your laughter, your wit, your culture and amiability?' Milton has plenty of other friends and acquaintances, but he realizes that tried and true comrades are rare: 'We mortals are a hard race, a stock driven by a cruel fate, strangers to each other's minds and hearts. Hardly out of a thousand does a man find a single kindred spirit.' Diodati was of Italian blood, and in Italy Milton had found men who also seemed like congenial souls: 'I shall never tire of your memory, Tuscan shepherds, youths devoted to the Muses. In you, too, were grace and charm. O how elated I was when, lying beside the cool murmuring Arno, . . . I listened to Menalcas contending with Lycidas in song! I dared to enter the contest myself, and I think I did not much displease you . . .'

He is reminded of many other things he had wanted to report to his dead friend, but, topping them all, there is his plan for a British epic, which he has already started to write: 'And I—I know not what exalted song my pipe was sounding—it is now eleven days and a night—perhaps I was putting my lips to new pipes, but the fastening broke and they fell asunder, unable to carry the deep sounds. I may be too bold, but I will tell about it . . . I would sing of the Trojan ships in the English sea, and of the ancient realm of Imogene, daughter of Pandrasus, and of the chiefs Brennus and Arviragus and old Belinus, and of the colonists in Armorica under British laws. Then I shall tell of Igraine pregnant with Arthur by a fatal treachery, of the counterfeit face and arms of Gorlöis, Merlin's wizardry.' This, of course, is an elaboration of the patriotic story which he had already mentioned in his poem to Manso. He has begun, now, to write it. He is ready to abandon both pastoral poetry and Latin, composing henceforth in English, on English themes. 'And why not? One man cannot do everything or even hope to do everything. There will be sufficient reward and honour, even though I am forever unknown and without fame in other nations, if only blond-haired Ouse reads me and he who drinks from the Alne and the whirling Humber' (171–6). It was a momentous decision for Milton. As it applied to prose, particularly the prose of his pamphlets on divorce, he was later to regret it. As it applied to poetry, he never changed his mind, allowing but few exceptions.

The *Epitaphium Damonis*, because it was printed and privately circulated, was in effect an announcement. For the first time in Milton's life he felt prepared to tell all persons concerned—his circle of old friends and new acquaintances—that he was now a poet, that he meant to write in English, and that his *magnum opus* was actually begun. Aged thirty-one that December, financially independent,[8] his education for poetry more or less completed, he put behind him all hesitancy, caution, and modesty. Two years after *Lycidas* the laurels and myrtles had reached their mellowing year; he would no longer be disturbing their season due. Late in 1639 he was ready to gather the fruits of long preparation.

For about a year and a half after his continental tour Milton was able to study and make literary plans without serious interruption. The household at Horton caused him no worry; it was apparently flourishing. Christopher was called to the bar on 26 January 1640, and on 11 August, in Horton church, an infant daughter was christened Sara, after her dead grandmother.[9] As for the continued stir over political affairs, Milton was content to leave the issue of events to God and to England's constituted governors. He noticed, of course, the frustration of the brief Parliament which met on 13 April and was then dissolved by an angry king on 5 May, after it had discussed grievances instead of providing subsidies for a second war with Scotland. Like other law-abiding citizens, Milton was also made nervous by the rioting in London during May, and he heard with indignation about the rout of the English forces at their first engagement with the Scots, on 28 August. He was glad, however, when this shameful defeat resulted in the royal order for a second Parliament, to meet on 3 November.[10]

Though he had about a year and a half of leisure (during which his tribute to Shakespeare was reprinted, this time with his initials),[11] we hear no more of an epic on King Arthur after 1639. The unsuccessful attempt to get it started, about which we are told in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, may have discouraged him somewhat; but there were clearly other factors involved in the decision to abandon it. The original idea seems to have been a direct product of the Italian journey. Whatever their lamentable ignorance of English literature and history, the Italians were quite familiar with Arthurian legend, and Milton's pleasure and surprise at discovering the fact may have led him to his premature but patriotic choice. Like Virgil, he wanted a national hero; and Arthur had already attracted the attention of the great Spenser. However, when Milton returned home and made a thorough study of the British historians,[12] his initial enthusiasm waned. A primary reason for that study was the gathering of epic materials, and, later in the 1640's, when he salvaged his labours by beginning a prose *History of Britain*, he doubted 'whether ever any such' as Arthur reigned in England, and spoke scornfully of persons who accepted legend for truth.[13] This change in attitude probably dates from 1640; his anti-episcopal pamphlets of the following year reveal him distrustful of all monkish annalists and of antiquarianism in general. Moreover, in his *Reason of Church Government* (1641) he expresses himself as open to suggestions for an epic subject.[14]

Following *Lycidas* in the Trinity Manuscript are seven pages of notes in Milton's handwriting, probably made within a year or so after his return from the Continent.[15] Among these notes are a suggestion for an epic on King Alfred and two subjects for pastoral poetry drawn from Scripture; but almost all the other jottings are concerned with possible themes for *dramas*. First, there is a page containing notes on 'Paradise Lost' as a tragedy; second, a page of notes from Old Testament stories; third, two pages of notes for possible tragedies from early British history; fourth, sketches of dramas on 'Abram from Morea', 'Baptistes', 'Sodom Burning', and 'Adam Unparadised' (these fill two pages); and last, a single page containing notes on 'Scotch stories' and further notes on possible dramas from Scripture.[16]

These lists provide interesting clues to Milton's plans and mental processes. He started three times to make a list of the characters in a play on 'Paradise Lost'; in three separate places on the first page he neatly and carefully wrote, 'the Persons'. The first two lists (at the top of the page) were, however, crossed out; and for the third attempt he decided to substitute a brief sketch of the five acts of the play. That he was dissatisfied with these preliminary notes is clear, not only because he made deletions and alterations, but also because a second, more detailed sketch of the plot occurs three pages later. This temporary dissatisfaction led him to investigate other possible subjects for drama. Between the first two lists of *dramatis personae* he wrote:

> other Tragedies
> Adam in Banishment
> The flood
> Abram in Egypt.

Turning over the page, he wrote in the top left-hand corner, in large letters, 'The Deluge', having apparently selected that particular one of the three subjects for further treatment. But he supplied no accompanying sketch or list of characters; instead, he wrote 'Sodom' beside it, and underneath 'Dinah', with a reference to Eusebius and a list of 'the Persons'—eleven of them, besides a chorus. Having gone this far in haphazard consideration of Old Testament subjects, he then began a new column on the right-hand side of the page, resolving to look more systematically for possible topics.

Undecided, at this stage in his notes, as to which subject or subjects he would develop further, Milton picked up a Bible, leafed through it, and jotted down ideas as they were suggested to him. Most of these notes he probably never thought of after the moment. The column begins with a title from Exodus. He skipped Leviticus as unfruitful. Then, in proper order, follow subjects inspired by Numbers, Joshua, Judges (with several titles from the story of Samson), Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 Kings. The continuation of this list, a second column started slightly below the sketch of 'Dinah', opens with the first chapter of 2 Kings, and there are a dozen or so subjects listed from this book. Having finally filled the page and taken from the Old Testament all of the topics that interested him, he headed two pages 'British Tragedies', returned to Abram with a detailed sketch of the plot, outlined a tragedy on John the Baptist, elaborated his idea of a play about Sodom, jotted down seven subjects from the New Testament, and finally returned to his original idea, making a detailed sketch of a drama on 'Paradise Lost', first using a new title, 'Adam's Banishment', then changing it to 'Adam Unparadised'.[17]

Although recently committed to an epic treating of Britain from the time of Trojan Brutus, Milton was now plainly interested in a later period of history; his thirty-eight subjects for a British tragedy were all chosen, not from the legendary age, but from the years between the Roman conquest and 1066. His notes as a whole, however, suggest that he was then chiefly fascinated by the dramatic, not epic, possibilities of the story of the Fall of Man. In his Commonplace Book, about this same time, he wrote: 'A wonderful and very pleasing little story is told by Bede about an Englishman who was suddenly made a poet by divine Providence.'[18] The story was of Cædmon's being told in his sleep to 'Sing the beginning of created things', so that 'he presently began to sing verses to the praise of God'.

Milton's two sketches of a drama on 'Paradise Lost' show that he was still close to the mood of *Comus*. He greatly admired the drama of the Greeks, but his projected play hovers somewhere between Jacobean masque and Italian neo-classical tragedy.[19] In his first sketch, the play opens with a Euripidean prologue spoken by Moses; but three personifications discuss Adam's future in the first act, Heavenly Love and the Evening Star engage in dialogue through the second act, and the protagonist does not appear until the drama is more than half over. In the last scene of all, the stage is crowded with mute personifications, and at least five characters seem to engage in dialogue. Whatever this may be, it is not Greek. In the second sketch, the plot is even more detailed, and compared with the first sketch (or with any Attic drama) the play is crowded with incident. The Fall takes place off-stage during the course of the tragedy, but before we have seen the protagonist. (Prelapsarian nudity inhibited the playwright.) Near the close there is a 'masque of all the evils of this life and world'.

It was probably in the autumn of 1640 that Milton finally moved from his temporary lodgings and rented a house in Aldersgate Street, just beyond the city walls, in the second precinct of St. Botolph's parish.[20] In many ways it was an ideal location. Aldersgate Street was unusually free from noise; the house was back from the street, at the end of an entry, and situated in a garden. It was also a handsome dwelling, ample enough to hold his growing library and the household furnishings he had accumulated, probably as a result of his father's giving up the Horton residence and moving to Reading with Christopher and his family. He found a servant, Jane Yates; and it became possible for young Edward Phillips to come also and board with him.[21]

The Miltonic education of John and Edward Phillips now more 'vigorously proceeded' (as the latter, fifty-four years later, still recalled). Their schoolmaster-uncle had very definite but very unorthodox ideas. On the one hand, he was strict in his expectations and his demands for discipline; on the other, he was not at all aloof but most familiar and free in his conversation with them. One of the first things he had done was to teach them to sing, and periodically the house in Aldersgate Street would ring with youthful voices.[22] Milton believed in the necessity for recognizing his young charges as individuals, with aptitudes to be discovered and developed.[23] He did not, however, believe in the common practice of forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations. Composition, he himself had painfully learned, was an act of ripest judgement, the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing—not something to be wrung from poor striplings, like the plucking of untimely fruit.[24]

He bitterly resented many elements in his own education, particularly the time lost in such preposterous exercises. He was resolved that his nephews should profit from his own unfortunate experiences. Language study, for example, should be almost immediately functional, for language is but an instrument conveying to us things useful to be known. 'Though a linguist should pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into, yet if he have not studied the solid things in them, as well as the words and lexicons, he were nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only.' English, unfortunately, did not as a language afford experience and tradition enough for all kinds of learning; one must be taught, therefore, 'the languages of those people who have at any time been most industrious after wisdom'—Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and, perhaps, Italian and French. On the other hand, it was a mistake to spend seven or eight years in merely scraping together as much miserable Latin or Greek as might, with sensible teaching, be learned easily and pleasantly in one year. Such pedagogy obscured the purpose of language study, by emphasizing the means instead of the end. Put a new language to work immediately; minimize attention to grammar; eliminate all immature composition; stress continued and judicious reading of authors with the best styles; then, when the student grows older and has something of his own to say, he will say it naturally in the purest idiom, without wretched barbarisms. This seemed to Milton the most rational and most profitable way of learning languages.[25]

He tried his theories on John and Edward, and was successful. He taught them first the chief, necessary rules of Latin grammar;[26] the boys were required to memorize quickly the forms of speech, and were instructed in the Italian rather than the English pronunciation of Latin. He did not keep them long in grammatical 'flats and shallows', but, as soon as they seemed ready, taught them to read, choosing some 'easy and delightful book' for this purpose,[27] and going through it with them very thoroughly. This done, language became an instrument to be used, and the teacher directed his two pupils to 'the substance of good things'. The first classical writers he gave them to study were Cato and Varro; the language was difficult for them, he knew, but the subject-matter was easy and not beyond their years. A young Englishman should be informed on agricultural matters, and should be concerned especially with problems of soil conservation. Within a year's time, the Phillips boys were capable of understanding a Latin author at sight.[28]

Thus the household in Aldersgate Street settled into a studious routine. Years later, Edward remembered his uncle as 'perpetually busied in his own laborious undertakings of the book or pen.'[29] On suitable occasions Milton chatted informally and memorably with his impressionable charges, but for the most part the routine was strict and vigorous, the teacher setting an example to his pupils of hard study and a temperate diet. Mornings they were awake with the birds in summertime; in winter, often before the bells of London called men to work or devotion. Reading began early and continued until about ten-thirty or eleven, when the attention became weary and memory was satiated. For an hour or so before dinner at noon, teacher and students took some form of exercise and then rested briefly. This rest period was usually the time for singing, or for listening while Milton played the organ or some other musical instrument. Sometimes the music continued for a while after dinner, depending upon their uncle's mood; he believed that music sent the mind back to study in good tune. Throughout the afternoon the work was renewed; and then after supper—a plain and moderate meal—Milton would talk to them about religion and tell them the story of Scripture until it was bedtime.[30]

From this routine there were no variations for the pupils, and but few for Milton. Now and then he would spend an evening with some friend, perhaps Alexander Gill, who lived nearby, or Henry Lawes, or a newer acquaintance or neighbour.[31] Long afterwards, Edward Phillips remembered one 'advantage' which the teacher had over his students: 'Once in three weeks or a month he would drop into the society of some young sparks of his acquaintance, the chief whereof were Mr. Alphry and Mr. Miller, two gentlemen of Gray's Inn, the beaux of those times (but nothing near so bad as those nowadays). With these gentlemen he would so far make bold with his body as now and then to keep a gaudy-day.'[32] They were a poor substitute, no doubt, for Charles Diodati or the sparkling companionship he had found in Florence, but his pupil was obviously impressed by the lively friends with whom he fought off loneliness.

While Milton continued his study of British history, Clio was importunate in travail. England, too, had emerged from her Horton period, masques and pastorals behind her. She was ready to sing, not of the past, but of the shining future. She was interested, not in King Arthur, but in the Kingdom of God on earth. On 3 November 1640 there met an assembly to be remembered for ever as the Long Parliament. In November of 1640 the tyrannical Strafford was imprisoned in the Tower, while John Lilburne and other Puritan leaders were released. In November the Commons was gathering its strength for the impeachment of Archbishop

Laud. In November the topic on every tongue was reform. In Milton's study, in the quiet garden-house in Aldersgate Street, the coming millennium did not go unnoticed. Gradually things became clear; poetry could wait. For patriotic Englishmen with trained minds and literary gifts there were more urgent jobs to be done.

Today, no longer much interested in ecclesiastical controversy of the seventeenth century, we are in danger of forgetting Milton's Protestant zeal and the intensity of his patriotism, both of which had recently been strengthened by contact with foreign and Roman Catholic nations. More concerned with Milton's art than with the spirit that produced it, some of us may even consider his prose a prostitution of his genius.[33] This, however, is to ignore not only his essential conviction of ministry, but also his creative temper stirred by the vision of a regenerate society. The simple truth, often obscured by critics who persist in regarding Milton solely as a poet, is that he had dedicated *all* his talents to the service of God and country. Writing pamphlets against the tyranny of the prelates was no diversion of his abilities as he understood them. For just such useful labour he had trained himself in Church history; he could complain of no insufficiency to an argument on ecclesiastical government. Specific hopes for a patriotic epic or religious drama were easily subordinated to larger and more important hopes for a reformed England. Poetry was but one weapon in the arsenal of liberty, and it could await its turn.

Indeed, postponing his poetic projects, Milton probably thought that he could return to verse within a year or two. Politically, his eye was solely on the present; get rid of the bishops and prelatical corruption, and all will be well. Then, he assured God in his first pamphlet: 'then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, someone may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measures to sing and celebrate Thy divine mercies and marvellous judgements in this land throughout all ages'.[34] The same thought occurred in his third pamphlet: 'He that now for haste snatches up a plain, ungarnished present as a thank-offering to Thee, which could not be deferred in regard of Thy so many late deliverances wrought for us, one upon another, may then perhaps take up a harp and sing Thee an elaborate song to generations.'[35] Deserting his British epic so soon after announcing its inception seemed, in 1641, no tragedy and not much of a sacrifice. It was an embarrassment, perhaps, after so long a time to proclaim one's self a poet and then produce no poetry, but in 1641 Milton did not realize that *for almost twenty years* his energies would be largely devoted to prosaic matters. Even in his fourth and fifth pamphlets he went out of his way to inform his readers of great verse soon to be written. So confident was he now of his powers that he widened the circle already addressed in the *Epitaphium Damonis* and asked the literary public to accept him as a potential poet.

It is as easy as it is misleading to call such a person naïve. The life which

Milton's father had thus far made possible had left the son remarkably free from inhibitions and complexes of a familiar kind. He had been encouraged to be outspoken; he had almost never been forced to compromise; he had been financially, socially, and intellectually independent. It had been simple for him to ignore or to avoid either people or situations in any way distasteful. At thirty-two he had yet to experience, intimately and directly, the world's vast resistance to new ideas based on reason, and its vast suspicion, quickly changed to rancour, of persons who place integrity above convention and who dare to travel alone. Looking at Milton's life from one point of view, we may think him ridiculously sheltered; but from another point of view he was extraordinarily prepared. For he must have developed early those incredible resources of faith and fortitude which enabled him to bear, and rise above, the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, even the pangs of despised love—more affliction by far than the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Who can doubt that the sources of so much strength lay in an exceptional home, in Christian parents who had not only dedicated their son to greatness but had looked well to the details of preparation? His *naïveté* had triple bronze underneath.

When Milton decided to take part in controversy, he decided, in effect, to become a pamphleteer. Lacking a pulpit or access to the floor of Parliament, he turned to the only other means of public expression known to his age. Since the daily newspaper and monthly magazine were yet unborn, men with a timely message wrote pamphlets, and bookstalls provided a forum for the moulding of opinion. The opening of the Long Parliament released a flood of this ephemeral literature: impassioned arguments, visionary schemes, bitter complaints, learned proposals—the flotsam and jetsam of a stormy state, the verbal accompaniment of history in the making. The names of certain writers quickly became household words—John Goodwin, John Lilburne, William Prynne. Sensing the future value of this outpouring of print, one London bookseller, George Thomason, a friend of Milton, started a collection for the benefit of posterity; and within twenty years he had crammed his shelves and closets with almost 22,000 books and pamphlets. Other booksellers, not so foresighted, contented themselves with satisfying the demands of living readers. Laymen refuted the sermons of famous divines; ordinary citizens replied to speeches made in Parliament; anonymous writers argued, and were answered by anonymous writers. It was a period of multitudinous debate on matters political and religious.

Milton's five anti-episcopal tracts were all printed within the space of a single year. All except one were published anonymously, but he was evidently confident of being identified by those few whose recognition he most desired. The first pamphlet was addressed to an unnamed friend, who may well have been responsible for Milton's abrupt plunge into 'a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes'.[36] Very probably this friend was his childhood tutor, Thomas Young, if not all of SMECTYMNUUS. That eye-catching pseudonym was coined from the initials of five Presbyterian divines who in 1641 joined forces against Episcopacy: Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, and William (double-U) Spurstow.[37] Young was the oldest of the five, and the ringleader. Their quinary quill was first employed in March with *An Answer* to Bishop Joseph Hall's *An Humble Remonstrance to the High Court of Parliament*, which had appeared late in January.[38] To this *Answer*, registered on 20 March, Milton almost certainly contributed a ten-page, unsigned 'Postscript', with data drawn largely from his recent reading of British history.[39] Such scholarly support for a theological argument was needed; Hall's earlier *Episcopacy by Divine Right* (1640) had been an eloquent, learned defence of beleaguered prelacy, and the bishop loomed as a formidable opponent in any battle of words.

Milton's first tract was not, however, directed against any particular pamphlet or person. Entitled *Of Reformation touching Church-Discipline in England and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it*,[40] this essay stated the case against prelatical government in terms more scholarly than controversial. In it the author brought to bear his theological and historical studies, and exhibited no irritation at turning from poetry to prose. He was highly indignant, however, at the ecclesiastical system which had 'filled this land with late confusion and violence' (12).[41] He blamed prelacy, not monarchy, for the recent fraternal war with the sincere and moderate people of Scotland, who had striven against manifold provocations (60–61). Money that should have been spent upon schools and churches, and a decent maintenance of parish ministers, had been squandered instead upon costly ceremonies (54–55).[42] Every shire cried out against the extortion and corruption; the complaints were grievous and innumerable. Furthermore, many thousands 'of faithful and freeborn Englishmen, and good Christians, have been constrained to forsake their dearest home, their friends and kindred, whom nothing but the wide ocean and the savage deserts of America could hide and shelter from the fury of the bishops' (50, 52). It was a special disgrace that England, which had led in reformation, blowing 'the first evangelic trumpet to the nations', now lagged behind the reformed churches abroad in discipline, 'which is the execution and applying of doctrine home' (5–6). Prelacy had always been a curse: 'to our souls, a sad and doleful succession of illiterate and blind guides; to our purses and goods, a wasteful band of robbers, a perpetual havoc and rapine; to our state, a continual Hydra of mischief and molestation, the forge of discord and rebellion' (67).

Milton wrote under the excitement of the moment; the kingdom was in 'a good propensity' for reform, and all men were 'in prayers, in hopes, or in disputes either for or against it' (6). Nevertheless, his objections to

Episcopacy, as he interpreted Episcopacy, were personal and fundamental. Salvation is personal; it is not a business under the exclusive management of bishops. The study of virtue and religion is a privilege and obligation of the individual; it is not a prerogative of prelates. Saving knowledge is to be found in the easily comprehended parts of Scripture, not in the difficult and clouded passages. 'The very essence of truth is plainness and brightness; the darkness and crookedness is our own' (33). Episcopacy is evil because it contemns the essential dignity of the individual. The people of God, 'dignified with so many glorious titles of saints and sons in the Gospel, are now no better reputed than impure ethnics and lay dogs' (19). They are asked to surrender the vital concerns of the spirit, and be satisfied with externality of worship, with the ostentation of ceremonies.

In writing *Of Reformation*, Milton gave fervent expression to one bias born of recent experience and another based on total inexperience. His study of Church history and British chronicles had filled him with contempt for the current votaries of antiquity, the 'Antiquitarians (for so I had rather call them than Antiquaries, whose labours are useful and laudable)' (14). The situation had reached such a ridiculous extreme that 'what pastor or minister, how learned, religious, or discreet soever, does not now bring both his cheeks full blown with Oecumenical and Synodical, shall be counted a lank, shallow, unsufficient man, yea a dunce, and not worthy to speak about reformation of Church discipline' (35). Thoroughly enjoying the paradox, Milton drew upon his own knowledge of antiquity to prove the 'Antiquitarians' fools. Since men were bent upon idolizing names instead of truth, he would lay open the faults and blemishes of Fathers, Christian emperors, or martyrs—even the hallowed Latimer and Ridley (8–10). If his readers were shocked, so much the better; let them be shocked enough to seek the truth.

As for 'Presbytery, if it must be so called', Milton knew nothing from direct experience about this form of church government; but like many other English nonconformists he was now convinced that it was preferable to Episcopacy. Surely, after so much misery under the prelates, Presbytery was no 'desperate hazard'. It was 'an unseasonable foresight' to worry about the greater corruption which might grow from a discipline superseding Episcopacy. With God pointing the way to reformation, men should not hesitate through fear of future evil. The 'objection vanishes of itself' (73, 75, 68).

He lived to regret such uncritical optimism, but, meanwhile, he lavishly and intemperately lashed out at all that his frugal and temperate soul despised.[43] It would be wonderful to be rid at last of those arrogant and worldly prelates who, 'coming from a mean and plebeian life, on a sudden to be lords of stately palaces, rich furniture, delicious fare, and princely attendance, thought the plain and homespun verity of Christ's gospel unfit any longer to hold their Lordships' acquaintance, unless the poor threadbare matron were put into better clothes' (25). Every middle-class bias in Milton's nature was aroused. He had no quarrel with monarchy; he respected (and aspired to) true aristocracy; but he hated the usurpers, the impostors, who neglected affairs spiritual and flaunted their temporal authority. 'The evangelical precept forbids churchmen to intermeddle with worldly employments' (40).

Filled with these emotions and these convictions, Milton was busily composing *Of Reformation* during April and the first half of May 1641.[44] As his first publication in prose, the essay was carefully organized. It was an inquiry into the causes that had hindered the development of true discipline in the English Church, neither 'God's part' nor the efforts of Papists, but the causes for which Englishmen were themselves responsible. 'Orderly proceeding' divided the inquiry 'into our forefathers' days and into our times' (6–7). In a compact, closely reasoned survey of the Church from the age of Henry VIII, Milton analysed the situation which had resulted in a compromise with Catholicism instead of complete reformation. Coming then to the present, he classified the hinderers of true discipline as 'Antiquitarians', libertines, and politicians. The first group he undertook to demolish with their own weapon, proving out of antiquity three things. First, 'he that will mould a modern bishop into a primitive must yield him to be elected by the popular voice, undiocesed, unrevenued, unlorded, and leave him nothing but brotherly equality, matchless temperance, frequent fasting, incessant prayer, and preaching, continual watchings, and labours in his ministry' (19). Second, there was a threefold corruption in ancient times: 'the best times were spreadingly infected; the best men of those times foully tainted; the best writings of those men dangerously adulterated' (20). And third, the best men of ancient times disclaimed personal authority and sent all to the Scriptures. So much for the arguments of the 'Antiquitarians'. As for the libertines, fearing a pope in every parish, they liked no form of discipline; and Milton gave them but a paragraph of reproof.

The second part, or 'book', of the pamphlet is devoted to the political hinderers of reformation. 'This is the masterpiece of a modern politician, how to qualify and mould the sufferance and subjection of the people to the length of that foot that is to tread on their necks, how rapine may serve itself with the fair and honourable pretences of public good, how the puny Law may be brought under the wardship and control of lust and will' (37–38). We should learn instead, urged Milton, 'to train up a nation in true wisdom and virtue, and that which springs from thence, magnanimity' (37); such is to govern well. Seek the causes of happiness in the individual, and you will find them for the whole state. It follows, therefore, that whatever is agreeable to monarchy will soonest appear so, by being agreeable to the welfare of Christian subjects. The form of government is, in fact, irrelevant to the argument, because ' 'tis not the common law nor the civil, but piety and justice that are our foundresses; they stoop not, neither change colour, for Aristocracy, Democracy, or Monarchy' (69). On the other hand, the treatment of kings by bishops in both British and European history argues that prelacy is destructive of monarchy. The more temporal strength the Church acquires, the more the civil government loses. Note the recent attacks on English liberties and the consequent popular commotion; then remember that 'the dissolution of monarchy slides aptest into a democracy' (57). Monarchy need not fear a reformation of Church discipline: 'the king shall sit without an old disturber, a daily encroacher and intruder; shall rid his kingdom of a strong sequestered and collateral power, a confronting mitre, whose potent wealth and wakeful ambition he had just cause to hold in jealousy' (63).

Reformation should also bring an improvement in England's foreign policy, an end to prelatical 'disparaging and alienating from us all Protestant princes and commonwealths' (51). It is not safe that Catholic France should be aiding England's natural allies against Austria and Spain. Yet Protestant England, under Episcopacy, has been unfriendly to the Protestant nations on the Continent, and religion has been turned to their reproach. It is time to 'cut away from the public body the noisome and diseased tumour of prelacy, and come from schism to *unity* with our neighbour Reformed sister churches' (62).

Near the close of the second 'book', Milton disturbed his neat organization in order to answer some recent arguments, including arguments from the 'libertines' whom he had earlier dismissed. He named no opponents, but he was chiefly disturbed by the *Third Speech* of Lord George Digby, delivered in Parliament on 8 February.[45] To such cautious objectors as Digby he replied in crusading mood. There need be no fear of running into sudden extremes, since they were extremes of truth and virtue. The reformation in England was long overdue, and those sensing a 'bugbear danger' should note well the safety with which the reformed churches abroad had leaped from rigid popery 'into that which we in mockery call "precise puritanism"' (66–67). Having thus confidently answered 'the sluggish and timorous politician', Milton launched into a breathless tirade against prelacy, and concluded with an eloquent prayer for divine deliverance.

*Of Reformation* is a work of scholarship and considerable literary skill. Its philosophy is not profound; its contribution to religious thought is not timeless; but in the hurried and flustered pamphleteering of its day Milton's tract is an exceptional production, with its muster of history, its quotations from Chaucer, its poetical translations from Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto.[46] He composed it in comparative leisure, attentive to form and style. In considering its place in Milton's development as an artist, we should realize that when he turned to prose in 1641, he turned to a less congenial, but not an uncongenial, medium of expression. Although he was using his left hand, it was, nevertheless, a highly skilled hand. He had been told that his prose style 'was likely to live',[47] and he admitted as much, publicly. He had always intended to write prose as well as poetry; he regarded himself as a man of letters, not exclusively as a singer of songs. Under no compulsion of controversy he was eventually to write for publication a grammar, a logic, two histories, and a treatise of Christian doctrine.

Since *Of Reformation* was published anonymously, it could hardly have gained him any fame except among those persons who already admired him for his learning. It was undoubtedly read by others, but how widely there is now no way of knowing. A writer who called himself 'Peloni Almoni' (i.e., Anonymous) noted the tract immediately upon its appearance, and took exception to views expressed by its 'late unworthy Author' on Irenaeus, who happened to be the subject of Almoni's *Compendious Discourse*.[48] In the following year Thomas Fuller, mentioning the disesteem in which Cranmer, Ridley, and other Protestant martyrs were currently held, instanced the author of *Of Reformation*—'whosoever he was'—as traducing them in reprehensible language.[49] Bishop John Bramhall, writing in 1643, also noticed Milton's disrespectful comments on these worthies, and, in a paragraph pleading for England to acknowledge its blessings from them, damned the 'young novice' for his loose tongue.[50] All three writers ignored the main thesis of Milton's pamphlet; all three used a fragment of it as a momentary springboard for some argument of their own. It was to be many years before anyone else mentioned it, even incidentally, in print.

Unfortunately for those who would now study the reception of Milton's pamphlets,[51] the printed allusions to them by his contemporaries tell us little. They contain few compliments; most are devoted to reviling or ridiculing him; even the number of serious rebuttals is small. If we judge his reputation on such evidence alone, we shall have a strangely distorted picture, one which leaves out of account the private applause of friends and the approving nods of mute, inglorious strangers whose thoughts he had expressed. To say this is not to sentimentalize; it is to take a realistic view of human nature; for then, as now, consent usually gives silence, while disagreement is vocal. We may believe Milton when he later declares that 'divers learned and judicious men testified their daily approval' of his pamphlets, even if these persons have left little trace of themselves.[52]

Having written *Of Reformation*, he felt himself a part of the dynamic effort to dethrone the bishops and restore English liberties. Just before (or about the time) his pamphlet had seen print, a Bishops' Exclusion Bill had passed the Commons (1 May), the Parliament had voted, with doggedness and foresight, to make itself indissoluble except by its own consent (8 May), and Strafford had been executed (12 May). Earlier (1 March), Laud had been impeached and put in the Tower. Events moved swiftly. On 27 May, when the ink was scarcely dry on *Of Reformation*, a bill was introduced in the Commons for the utter abolishing of Episcopacy, 'root and branch'.

The Bishops' Exclusion Bill was rejected by the Lords on 8 June, but, faced with growing hostility, the bishops counter-attacked with fresh and unexpected reserves. Milton's tract reached the bookstalls almost simultaneously with a new, and disconcerting, publication in defence of prelacy. This was a brief, sixteen-page pamphlet with the title, *The Judgement of Doctor Rainoldes touching the originall of Episcopacy, more largely confirmed out of Antiquity by James, Archbishop of Armagh.*[53] Dr. John Reynolds had been dead for thirty-four years, but he was well remembered as a worthy divine of Low Church if not Puritan sympathies. The learned James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, was still very much alive, and was widely respected among nonconformists as a leader of the Low Church party. He had been opposed to the High Church views of Laud, and had therefore been especially admired by those Puritans not committed to Presbyterianism. With his entrance into the current struggle, the forces of Episcopacy suddenly closed ranks, and the debate threatened to become hopelessly confused. Was the question one of purified Episcopacy, as before, or abolished Episcopacy, as the 'root and branch' party now urged?

Although he had just expressed his views thoroughly, Milton felt that something had to be done to counteract the Ussher–Reynolds influence, even at the price of repetition. The arguments in Ussher's tract made him an 'antiquitarian' by Milton's recent definition; but because Ussher was Ussher, in his hands antiquity was a potentially effective weapon, dangerous to ignore. Milton decided to attack the weapon, not the man. In composing an answer, he would not set himself up as more learned than the great archbishop, but it might be possible, without false modesty, to analyse the primate's evidence in the light of reason. Unusual times called for unusual boldness.

Intently, he prepared an essay *Of Prelatical Episcopacy, and Whether it may be deduc'd from the Apostolical times by vertue of those Testimonies which are alledg'd to that purpose in some late Treatises: One whereof goes under the Name of James, Archbishop of Armagh.*[54] Milton made three main points, one positive, two negative. The positive he stated very briefly at both the beginning and the end of his reply: it was not only unnecessary, but even impious, to adduce patristic authority for three ecclesiastical orders when only two, deacon and bishop (or presbyter), are plainly authorized by Holy Gospel. This was a matter of fundamental conviction as to the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and it did not lend itself to elaboration. One of Milton's negative arguments could also be stated briefly: the patristic evidence used by Ussher was dangerous, because it supported papacy as much as it supported Episcopacy. Indeed, this complicated and foolish game of arguing from antiquity was one which the most learned

English bishops commonly lost to Jesuits when they were so ill advised as to attempt it.

The second negative argument, that Ussher's patristic evidence was utterly unreliable by the test of common sense, constituted the bulk of Milton's rebuttal. He developed it in a point-by-point analysis, with page references to Ussher's tract. There were ten points in all. Ussher noted that Photius had read a nameless treatise which referred to Timothy as a bishop; what did Ussher think of the *preceding* story in Photius, about the seven martyrs who slept for 372 years and were found living? Why should we accept the traditions of Polycrates concerning Episcopacy when Victor, Bishop of Rome, excommunicated Polycrates for his traditions concerning the feast of Easter? Ussher had cited the testimony of Tertullian on the appointment of bishops by the Apostles; can Ussher also show, out of Tertullian, that the word 'bishop' signified an ecclesiastical order above presbyters? He cannot, but suppose he could; should we then believe Tertullian, who elsewhere makes Christ a derivation from and therefore inferior to the Father?[55] It is not common sense to urge the sufficiency of an author on a matter which you want to believe, when the author is obviously unreliable on other matters. Ussher was also guilty of drawing evidence from documents, like the epistles of Ignatius, so corrupted with obvious forgeries that no one can be sure of what is genuine.

Thus went Milton's argument; a few examples are enough to illustrate his method. He was not disrespectful to an opponent so 'deeply conversant in books' (82). Neither was he overawed: 'it came into my thoughts to persuade myself, setting all distances and nice respects aside, that I could do religion and my country no better service for the time than doing my utmost endeavour to recall the people of God from this vain foraging after straw, and to reduce them to their firm stations under the standard of the Gospel' (82–83). Be it Ussher or some lesser man, it was still wrong to 'leave the Bible to gad after these traditions of the ancients' (86), and if Ussher's learning could so mislead his Christianity, he did not deserve to be answered altogether seriously. Milton was not flippant in his reply, but he was occasionally satiric. Polycarp, a supposedly infallible prophet, foretold his own death by burning; yet when the time came, the fire was overawed, a soldier stabbed Polycarp, and his gushing blood extinguished the fire. It appears not from this, said Milton, how the fire was guilty of his death; and such 'a light scruple or two I would gladly be resolved in' before accepting other evidence adduced from antiquity (95).

Although he was convinced that an episcopal hierarchy was without justification, Milton was willing to admit the existence of, even the necessity for, a social hierarchy of natural gifts. Polycarp, for example, may have been a man of great eminence in the Church, to whom his fellow presbyters deferred because of his virtue and wisdom. The same human necessity occurs, he pointed out, in state affairs, when a Brutus or a

Pericles assumes the functions of a king. In such ancient instances superior ability resulted in 'a temporary and elective sway, which was in the will of the people when to abrogate' (92). But prelatical tyranny is a far cry from popular sovereignty.

Archbishop Ussher did not answer the anonymous tract which so confidently challenged the reliability of his patristic materials. Furthermore, we do not know what effect, if any, Milton's arguments had upon the men who were then fashioning the future of the Church. When he urged his readers to turn from the dark shadow of antiquity and face the sun of Scripture, he was expressing a conviction already held by the forces of Puritanism, and his nimble boxing with the shadow may have encouraged a few of the more knowing in such matters. It could hardly have converted any bishops.[56]

As a matter of fact, Bishop Joseph Hall was causing 'Smectymnuus' a good deal of concern. His *Defence of the Humble Remonstrance against the frivolous and false exceptions of Smectymnuus* had been registered for publication on 12 April, and enjoyed two editions during 1641. The five Presbyterian ministers had been busy with *A Vindication of the Answer to the Humble Remonstrance* while Milton had been composing *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*. Their *Vindication* was ready to be registered on 26 June. During the 'hot season' Milton decided to come to their aid against Hall.[57]

He was by now thoroughly tired of arguing the merits of antiquity. Even if he were not persuaded of the sufficiency of Scripture as a guide, the bandying of Fathers and councils would be, he thought, a stupid and futile game. The books were numberless; reading them all was impossible in a lifetime, and reading part was imperfect knowledge. Surely, 'every rule and instrument of necessary knowledge that God hath given us ought to be so in proportion as may be wielded and managed by the life of man without penning him up from the duties of human society' (139). The Bible provided such a rule. Besides, he dared to believe that 'reason is the gift of God in one man as well as in a thousand' (126). The decisions of the grave councils were based on no more than human reasoning, and the reasoning was not always good. In answering Hall, he would exercise his own intelligence and not chase the wily bishop through the wide and dusty country of the councils. The Antiquitarians were learned men, but learning is both barren and vain without true wisdom and grace. In religious controversy a learned fool is forever 'sowing the world with nice and idle questions, and with much toil and difficulty wading to his auditors up to the eyebrows in deep shallows that wet not the instep. A plain, unlearned man that lives well by that light which he has, is better and wiser, and edifies others more towards a godly and happy life than he' (163). Indeed, one may 'commonly find more savoury knowledge in one layman than in a dozen of cathedral prelates' (131). Hall had been contemptuous of the petition for Church reform which the citizens of London had submitted the previous December: 'our great clerks think that these men, because they have a trade (as Christ himself and St. Paul had) cannot therefore attain to some good measure of knowledge' (118–19). Milton, however, felt that he would trust the simple wisdom of a tradesman before the trickish learning of a council-wise priest.

His own learning, acquired at such pains, could be justified as an instrument for unselfish ends. He could not be accused of traffic with the cave of Mammon: 'Certainly never any clear spirit, nursed up from brighter influences with a soul enlarged to the dimensions of spacious art and high knowledge, ever entered there but with scorn, and thought it ever foul disdain to make pelf or ambition the reward of his studies—it being the greatest honour, the greatest fruit and proficiency of learned studies to despise these things. Not liberal science, but illiberal, must that needs be that mounts in contemplation merely for money' (162). Under prelatical Episcopacy the great curse, the root of all mischief, was the early and persistent encouragement of the clergy to mercenary ambitions. Milton's notion of the remedy was vaguely based upon his own fortunate experience, which clearly must have been God's doing:

> A true pastor of Christ's sending hath this especial mark, that for greatest labours and greatest merits in the Church he requires either nothing (if he could so subsist) or a very common and reasonable supply of human necessaries. We cannot, therefore, do better than to leave this care of ours to God . . . for if He give us to know Him aright, and to practise this our knowledge in right established discipline, how much more will He replenish us with all abilities in tongues and arts that may conduce to His glory and our good? He can stir up rich fathers to bestow exquisite education upon their children, and so dedicate them to the service of the Gospel . . . [163–4][58]

Milton did not know for certain how much, or even how, a clergyman should be paid; but he was convinced that his own preparation for the ministry had been ideal. A servant for God so generously nurtured will not covet secular office or authority, for 'no man can take from him the gift of wisdom and sound doctrine which leaves him free, though not to be a member, yet a teacher and persuader of the Parliament' (164–5).

Milton's peculiar detachment and independence, his sense of writing as a conscientious citizen, gave him certain very real advantages in the Smectymnuan affair. Bishop Hall was a more experienced writer than the five Presbyterian ministers who had ventured to attack him, and in defending himself he used 'no common arts'. He was skilled as a satirist and a controversialist; there was no denying his 'voluble and smart fluence of tongue' (106).[59] The Smectymnuans were in danger, therefore, of being talked down by sheer glibness and wit; they were either not willing or not able to counter in the same coin. On the other hand, after so much discussion of dull antiquity, Milton was in the mood for satire, and he decided to handle Hall as roughly as possible. He would greet the proud arguments of prelacy with a grim laughter, and then see what happened next.

He was fully conscious of beleaguering the bishop in an unusual manner, but the provocation was unusual:

> I had no fear but that the authors of *Smectymnuus*, to all the show of solidity which the Remonstrant could bring, were prepared both with skill and purpose to return a sufficing answer, and were able enough to lay the dust and pudder in antiquity which he and his, out of stratagem, are wont to raise. But when I saw his weak arguments headed with sharp taunts, and that his design was, if he could not refute them, yet at least with quips and snapping adages to vapour them out (which they, bent only upon the business, were minded to let pass), by how much I saw them taking little thought for their own injuries, I must confess I took it as my part the less to endure that my respected friends through their own unnecessary patience should thus lie at the mercy of a coy, flirting style—to be girded with frumps and curtal jibes, by one who makes sentences by the statute, as if all above three inches long were confiscate. To me it seemed an indignity that, whom his whole wisdom could not move from their place, them his impetuous folly should presume to ride over.

This was why Milton determined upon a tone of 'continual vehemence'. This was why, 'neglecting the main bulk of all that specious antiquity, which might stun children but not men, I chose rather to observe some kind of military advantages to await him at his foragings, at his waterings, and whenever he felt himself secure to solace his vein in derision of his more serious opponents'. There was still another reason. As a conscious stylist, and a nonconformist, Milton was annoyed by the popular assumption that Puritans were devoid of literary skill. He would disabuse Hall's admirers of their 'conceit that all who are not prelatical are gross-headed, thick-witted, illiterate, shallow. Can nothing, then, but Episcopacy teach men to speak good English, to pick and order a set of words judiciously? Must we learn from canons and quaint sermonings interlined with barbarous Latin to illumine a period, to wreathe an enthymeme with masterous dexterity?' Milton had a trick or two to show these smug 'men who pride themselves in their supposed art'.[60]

His *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus*[61] quoted verbatim, with page references, about 150 of Hall's statements and, in most instances, heaped ridicule on them. 'This close and succinct manner of coping with the adversary' was chosen, Milton explained, so that Hall might 'find no gain of money' and the reader might come speedily to see the truth without wandering in the usual 'labyrinth of controversial antiquity' (108). Milton twitted the prelate with faulty logic and careless phrasing; he pronounced him a poor fencer in argument; he pretended to teach him the rudiments of grammar and syntax. He made fun of several of the bishop's books; he mocked and scoffed and jeered and taunted whenever occasion offered. It was Milton's first attempt at flippancy and wholesale sarcasm, and the result was an amazing hodgepodge of heavy-handed humour, relieved only by a few longer passages of serious reflection on such matters as the education and proper function of the clergy. A few examples of the citation and rebuttal method will serve to illustrate the predominant tone:

*Remonstrant.* My single *Remonstrance* is encountered with a plural Adversary.

*Answer.* Did not your single remonstrance bring along with it a hot scent of your more than singular affection to spiritual pluralities, your singleness would be less suspected with all good Christians than it is. . . . [108]

*Remonstrant.* I do gladly fly to the bar.

*Answer.* To the bar with him then. 'Gladly', you say? We believe you as 'gladly' as your whole faction wished and longed for the assembling of this Parliament . . . [110]

*Remonstrant.* Those verbal exceptions are but light froth, and will sink alone.

*Answer.* O rare subtlety! . . . When, I beseech you, will light things sink? . . . Trust this man, Readers, if you please . . . [114]

*Remonstrant.* And if the Lord's Prayer be an ordinary and stinted form, why not others?

*Answer.* Because there be no other Lords that can stint with like authority. [125]

*Remonstrant.* No one clergy in the whole Christian world yields so many eminent scholars, learned preachers, grave, holy and accomplished divines, as this Church of England doth at this day.

*Answer.* Ha, ha, ha. [170]

Milton's manner in these *Animadversions* was no more abrupt and unsubtle than the vigorous march of events. Parliament was treating the prelates with scant courtesy. On 5 July 1641 the notorious Star Chamber and Court of High Commission were virtually abolished. On 4 August the Commons sent to the Lords a formal impeachment of thirteen of the bishops, among them Joseph Hall. As Milton exulted in his preface, God and man now seemed 'ready to explode and hiss out of the land' the whole hated hierarchy (106). In the almanac of history the summer solstice of prelacy was ending: 'the equator calls for you, to reduce you to the ancient and equal house of Libra' (138). There was cause to thank God for 'so many late deliverances wrought for us, one upon another' (148). In the *Animadversions* Milton told an unfinished parable; it was about an honest and diligent gardener, and an officious stranger who tried to interfere with his work. 'The gardener smiled and shook his head—but what was determined I cannot tell you till the end of this Parliament' (159). The conclusion was not yet, but there was cause for smiling.

Laughter and anger were, in Milton's opinion, the 'two most rational faculties of human intellect' (108). They were not, as a tender conscience might suppose, incompatible with Christian meekness. There was a time for meekness, and a time for grim laughter. In dealing with a fluent and wily opponent, a notorious enemy to truth and his country's peace, one might imitate the occasional vehemence which Christ Himself expressed. For these reasons Milton attempted, in his *Animadversions* on Hall, 'to send home his haughtiness well bespurted with his own holy-water' (106). Nevertheless, he felt called upon to justify his method in a preface, hoping that 'the softer spirited Christian' would not be offended. He wrote 'without all private and personal spleen', even with 'a sad and unwilling anger', for he realized that such a manner of writing, although not unchristian, was yet a hindrance to his 'hopes of ascending above a lowly and unenviable pitch in this life' (107).

The *Animadversions* was not registered at Stationers' Hall or licensed in any way; like *Of Reformation* and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* it was published in what its author welcomed as a time of free writing.[62] For many years 'liberty of speaking, than which nothing is more sweet to man', had been suppressed by 'monkish prohibitions and expurgatorious indexes', by the necessity for 'proud *imprimaturs* not to be obtained without the shallow surview (but not shallow hand) of some mercenary, narrow-souled, and illiterate chaplain'. The free-born people of England, after such 'an injurious strangle of silence', could at last freely speak their minds, and a great flood of pamphlets had resulted. Milton rejoiced, for though the precious gem of truth might prove as rare in these as among the numberless pebbles of the shore, nevertheless a censorship was 'something pinching in a kingdom of free spirits'. Furthermore, 'this permission of free writing, were there no good else in it, yet at some times thus licensed is such an unripping, such an anatomy of the shyest and tenderest particular truths as makes not only the whole nation in many points the wiser, but also presents and carries home to princes, and men most remote from vulgar concourse, . . . a full insight of every lurking evil or restrained good among the commons' (112–13).[63] Milton was proud to be one of the company of 'free-spoken and plain-hearted men that are the eyes of their country'.

More and more he was also thinking of himself as a teacher. In the preface of *Animadversions*, defending his use of laughter, he asserted that it 'hath ofttimes a strong and sinewy force in teaching' (107). Later, identifying teaching with Christian ministry, he agreed with the ancient philosophers that the greatest gain of a teacher is to make a soul virtuous (161); indeed, 'in all wise apprehensions the persuasive power in man to win others to goodness by instruction is greater and more divine than the compulsive power to restrain men from being evil by terror of the law; and therefore Christ left Moses to be the law-giver, but Himself came down amongst us to be a teacher' (165). In other parts of *Animadversions* he achieved his most biting sarcasm by assuming toward Bishop Hall the tone and manner of an indulgent schoolmaster. For example: 'Y'are too quick. This last place is to be understood by the former, as the Law of Method, which bears chief sway in the art of teaching, requires that clearest and plainest expressions be set foremost, to the end they may enlighten any following obscurity' (150).

Quite seriously Milton was following this 'Law of Method' in his private teaching of John and Edward Phillips.[64] During his first year with them he had concentrated on their learning of Latin, and, in order to become 'masters of any ordinary prose' in a single year's time, they had *used* Latin to learn arithmetic[65] and the elements of agriculture and conservation.[66] Arithmetic he had taught them as though it were a game ('even playing, as the old manner was').[67] Now in their second year, they were continuing their work in these two subjects, while adding geometry[68] and an introduction to natural science, the textbooks still in Latin, of course. A few particular subjects were introduced in an elementary way: astronomy, with study of celestial globes; geography, with study of maps.[69] Meanwhile (probably in the second year but no later than the third), Milton started them on Greek, his method being the same—a minimum of work with basic grammar, the pupils putting the language to immediate use in the acquisition of knowledge, the teacher reading to them, and explaining, some simple classic that would inspire them to study.[70] As they gained control of this additional language, a new pedagogical principle came into play: Greek was used to go over some familiar ground and confirm knowledge already obtained in Latin, while adding new information. And every Sunday, Milton read to them a chapter of the Greek New Testament, explicating it with learning and with piety.

The plan for the third year was a particularly striking illustration of the 'Law of Method'. Using either Latin or Greek, the boys would read elementary, introductory texts on meteorology, mineralogy, botany, biology, and anatomy—tackled in this order. Milton followed a sequence analogous to progress up the Great Chain of Being, from matter and plants to living creatures, the ultimate goal being, of course, 'knowledge of God and things invisible'.[71] While studying these natural sciences, his pupils would also learn, not an additional language, but trigonometry;[72] and this, like a foreign language, they would also put to immediate use, acquiring the elements of—in this order—fortification, architecture, and either military engineering or navigation.[73]

Despite this teaching programme, in the late summer and autumn of 1641 Milton again had leisure for private reading and literary planning.[74] Before December, when he was at work on a fourth pamphlet, his ideas had soared beyond the announced poem on King Arthur and were ranging among the three great forms which, as an aspirant to poetic honours, he had seriously to consider—epic, drama, and ode. He might attempt all three eventually, but he was ready to discuss with any 'elegant and learned reader' the potentialities and best examples of each, beginning with the epic. 'Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home in the spacious circuits of her musing hath liberty to propose to herself, though of highest hope and hardest attempting: Whether that epic form, whereof the two poems of Homer and those other two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the Book of Job a brief, model . . .' (237). Thus, in his fourth tract, *The Reason of Church Government*—the first tract to which he signed his name—Milton identified himself as a poet, and spoke ingenuously of his high ambitions. Literary enthusiasm, political optimism, and pride in this particular pamphlet combined to inspire an autobiographical digression which is still startling in its revealing irrelevance.

The occasion permitted only a sketch of speculation—not 'any certain account', not a definite statement of programme. The occasion also determined the form of the sketch; it is, among other things, a subtle argument, designed to convince the nonconformist or Presbyterian reader that poetry has religious sanction—designed, in other words, to vindicate a poetical ministry. Homer, Virgil, and Tasso are obvious models for the writer of epic, but Homer and Virgil were heathen and Tasso was a papist. Hence, he further cited 'the Book of Job'—'a brief model'.[75] (He also found models in the Bible for drama and ode.) That he then had no serious intention of writing a short epic is apparent from the next consideration: 'or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be followed, which in them that know art and use judgement is no transgression but an enriching of art. And lastly, what king or knight before the Conquest might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian hero' (237).

It is a single hero wanted, not a hero for the diffuse epic and another for the brief. To the rules of Aristotle (another heathen) Milton opposed 'nature', by which he possibly meant the romantic or chivalrous epic of Ariosto and Spenser, but more probably (as in sentences both preceding and following this passage) his own disposition and mature instinct, God directed.[76] As for the choice of subject, Milton assumed that his hero would be a Briton before the Norman Conquest, but did not declare himself already decided upon Arthur or Alfred. On the contrary, he was inclined to make a proposal which must have struck most of his readers as extraordinarily presumptuous: 'As Tasso gave to a prince of Italy his choice whether he would command him to write of Godfrey's expedition against the infidels or Belisarius against the Goths or Charlemagne against the Lombards, if to the instinct of nature and the emboldening of art aught may be trusted, and that there be nothing adverse in our climate or the fate of this age, it haply would be no rashness from an equal diligence and inclination to present the like offer in our own ancient stories' (237). Present the like offer to whom? Presumably to King Charles. Milton was not yet anti-royalist in sentiment; on the contrary, he had argued at length in *Of Reformation* that the reformed discipline would be more compatible with monarchy than prelatical Episcopacy had proved.

The second literary form to be considered was the drama. He spoke of 'dramatic' rather than specifically *tragic* poetry because one of his justifications in Scripture was not tragic: 'Or whether those dramatic constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation. The Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon, consisting of two persons and a double chorus, as Origen rightly judges; and the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies, and this my opinion the grave authority of Paraeus commenting that Book is sufficient to confirm' (237–8). He had offered no authority for his designation of the Book of Job as a 'brief epic', perhaps because he could find none.[77] Here, however, he was at pains to cite Origen and Paraeus to disarm Puritan criticism.

Third to be considered was lyric poetry: 'Or if occasion shall lead to imitate those magnific odes and hymns wherein Pindar and Callimachus are in most things worthy, some others in their frame judicious, in their matter most an end faulty; but those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable' (238). Biblical lyrics, unlike Biblical epic and drama, Milton found technically superior to secular verse.[78] Why then, with so many possible models in Scripture, consider the Greeks and Latins at all? Milton foresaw the question: 'These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power *beside the office of a pulpit* to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness and what He works . . .' (238; italics added). Here is Milton's open, public declaration of his poetical ministry. Without the office of a pulpit he will perform, in verse, the noblest functions of a clergyman. He was once 'church-outed by the prelates', but 'these abilities' give him office in the true, reformed Church of tomorrow.

As a Christian poet he would not hesitate to use heathen poetry as models, for whatever its subject-matter, its art was divinely inspired and hence worthy of imitation. He committed himself to no definite programme; the little words 'whether . . . or whether . . . or'—if they mean anything—indicate that late in 1641 Milton was still considering the virtues of various forms. Nevertheless, he made the 'knowing reader' a bold promise. If God assisted him, if the impertinent yoke of prelaty was removed, if knowledge and observation and insight proved sufficient, the reader might expect a poetical accomplishment within 'some few years' (241).

Milton's 'some few years' were to be twenty-six years in poignant fact; but he could not foresee, in 1641, how his own decisions and those of his countrymen would conspire against his hopes. He had but a faint fear of something 'adverse in . . . the fate of this age' as he bravely wrote: 'The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath plucked from me by an abortive and foredated discovery. And the accomplishment of them lies not but in a Power above man's to promise. But that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend . . . at mine own peril and cost I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them' (240–1). He felt no shame thus 'to covenant with any knowing reader'.

Milton believed that both Lucifer and Adam had been miserably degraded 'for aspiring above their orders' (196). In a sense, then, Lucifer 'was the first prelate angel', for episcopal government had also raised itself above the order prescribed in Scripture, and was due for a mighty fall. Because Milton felt it his duty to do everything in his power to hasten the catastrophe, in December of 1641 he was at work on the pamphlet mentioned above, his elaborate essay on *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty*.[79]

He returned to pamphleteering with considerable reluctance. Only the reader who understood his present exciting plans for poetry could realize 'with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, put from beholding the bright countenance of Truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies to come into the dim reflexion of hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk' (241). To make matters worse, he had discovered that controversial writing results in misunderstandings and personal animosities. Those being attacked stir men up 'to persecute with hatred and contempt all those that seek to bear themselves uprightly', and such authors soon 'find in the discharge of their commission that they are made the greatest variance and offence, a very sword and fire both in house and city over the whole earth. This is that which the sad prophet Jeremiah laments, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and contention!"' (230). Readers should learn 'not suddenly to condemn all things that are sharply spoken, or vehemently written, as proceeding out of stomach, virulence, and ill nature' (231).

The tracts against Ussher and Hall had evidently found an audience, and Milton was troubled by the response. Readers had said that 'some self-pleasing humour of vainglory' had incited him 'to contest with men of high estimation' while 'green years' were still upon his head (234). He was thirty-three before completing *The Reason of Church Government*, and he had two answers to such slanderous criticism:

> if any man incline to think I undertake a task too difficult for my years, I trust through the supreme enlightening assistance far otherwise; for my years, be they few or many, what imports it? So they bring reason, let that be looked on . . . neither envy nor gall hath entered me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only . . . if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season, when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies (although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand), or, were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit anything elaborately composed to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next, if I were wise only to mine own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of itself might catch applause (whereas *this* hath all the disadvantages on the contrary), and such a subject as the publishing whereof might be delayed at pleasure and time enough to pencil it over with all the curious touches of art, even to the perfection of a faultless picture (whenas in *this* argument the *not* deferring is of great moment to the good speeding, that if solidity have leisure to do her office, art cannot have much). Lastly, I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand. [183, 234–5; italics added]

Discussion of Church government was disquieting to many men, but the charitable reader should at least not misunderstand his motives. Strange, how heavy a burden to the spirit the knowledge of truth could be! 'He who hath obtained in more than the scantest measure to know anything distinctly of God and of His true worship, . . . remembering also that God even to a strictness requires the improvement of these His entrusted gifts, cannot but sustain a sorer burden of mind . . . how and in what manner he shall dispose and employ those sums of knowledge and illumination which God hath sent him into this world to trade with' (229). According to Milton's best light, the times seemed to demand prose, not poetry. Moreover, 'when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal' (231).

However distasteful further pamphleteering might prove, Milton's conscience would not allow his pen to remain inactive. 'Ease and leisure', it reminded him, were 'given thee for thy retired thoughts out of the sweat of other men. Thou hadst the diligence, the parts, the language of a man if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified'. (Does Milton's conscience here echo words spoken by the old scrivener, words to which *Ad Patrem* once seemed an adequate response?) From childhood he had been dedicated to the service of the Church, and he would never be able to forgive himself if he failed her in her hour of greatest crisis: 'should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me ability the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed, or should she by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithful men change this her distracted estate into better days without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me, I foresee what stories I should hear within myself all my life after, of discourage and reproach' (232). There was still another provocation: he had 'determined to lay up as the best treasure and solace of a good old age . . . the honest liberty of free speech' whenever he thought 'it available in so dear a concernment as the Church's good.'

The dominant tone of Milton's *The Reason of Church Government* lies in the second word of the title. There had been such an uproar over the relative claims of prelatical and Presbyterian government, and so many of the arguments had been illogical or far-fetched, that he was determined to try a thoroughly *reasonable* analysis of the problem. If it was deemed important to show the reasonableness and desirability of civil laws, 'how much more ought the members of the Church under the Gospel seek to inform their understanding in the reason of that government which the Church claims to have over them, especially for that the Church hath in her immediate care those inner parts and affections of the mind where the seat of reason is' (182). That he might 'not follow a chase rather than an argument' (195), Milton made one basic assumption: that either prelacy, or Presbyterianism, and nothing else, was of God's ordaining. He then undertook to prove that the 'ministerial order which the blessed Apostles constituted throughout the churches . . . can be no other than that of presbyters and deacons' (183). Such an order, he contended, is clearly implied in Scripture.

*The Reason of Church Government* is divided into two books, each with a preface, and with a conclusion to Book Two. In the first book Milton attempts to answer four major arguments in defence of prelacy: that the form of Church government was not completely prescribed in the Gospel, that it was left in part to the discretion of man, that it was patterned by the Old Testament Law or the Jewish priesthood, and that episcopal government is necessary for the prevention of schism. In the second book he *attacks* prelacy, arguing that it is foreign to the reason and the end of the Gospel in three respects: its lordly outward form, its ceremonious doctrine, and its tyrannical jurisdiction. In the conclusion he tries to demonstrate that prelacy not only sells the freedom of the people to the king but also undermines monarchy itself. Except for an eloquent section on ministerial censure and lay-ministry, his defence of Presbyterian government is largely an effort to demolish its alternative.

The tract is an elaborate and thoughtful composition, suggesting that solidity had 'leisure to do her office', however little time was left for art. The lusty, mocking tone of *Animadversions* is gone; gone, too, is the wild mixture of prophecy and vituperation with which Milton had vented his annoyance over the methods of ecclesiastical controversy. Like *Of Reformation*, his *Reason of Church Government* is a controlled, scholarly performance; like *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, it is an attempt to be reasonable. Many of the arguments of the three earlier pamphlets are repeated, but Milton generally avoids the 'learned scraping in antiquity' which he so heartily disliked. He mentions Bishop Hall briefly, and without abuse (208). Chapters three and five of his first book are largely refutations of views expressed by Ussher and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes in a recent collection published at Oxford, *Certaine Briefe Treatises, Written by Diverse Learned Men, concerning the ancient and Moderne government of the Church* (1641).[80] The remainder of Milton's tract would presumably have been the same if this work had never appeared. He had plainly resolved to eschew personalities.

On the other hand, his indignation at prelacy in the abstract is still intense, and there are further passages of prose invective against the corrupt clergy, reminiscent of *Lycidas*:

> Cling fast to your pontifical sees, bate not, quit yourselves like barons, stand to the utmost for your haughty courts and votes in Parliament. Still tell us that you prevent schism, though schism and combustion be the very issue of your bodies, your first-born; and set your country a-bleeding in a prelatical mutiny, to fight for your pomp and that ill-favoured weed of temporal honour that sits dishonourably upon your laic shoulders, that ye may be fat and fleshy, swollen with high thoughts and big with mischievous designs when God comes to visit upon you all this fourscore years' vexation of His Church under your Egyptian tyranny. For certainly of all those blessed souls which you have persecuted, and those miserable ones which you have lost, the just vengeance does not sleep. [221–2]

The conclusion is a stirring appeal to Parliament: 'Let your severe and impartial doom imitate the divine vengeance: rain down your punishing force upon this godless and oppressing government, and bring such a Dead Sea of subversion upon her that she may never in this land rise more to afflict the holy reformed Church and the elect people of God' (279).

Some of Milton's most cherished convictions find eloquent statement in *The Reason of Church Government*. As in the earlier tracts, he holds religion to be a deeply personal matter, and the Gospel a sufficient warrant for Church government as well as other spiritual direction: 'Let them chant while they will of prerogatives, we shall tell them of Scripture; of custom, we of Scripture; of Acts and Statutes, still of Scripture—till the quick and piercing Word enter to the dividing of their souls, and the mighty weakness of the Gospel throw down the weak mightiness of man's reasoning' (246). He continues to urge the separation of Church and State; indeed, he now boldly argues that the Church should have no jurisdictional power whatsoever, such power being censorship to the souls of men and an insufferable tyranny. Man should be his own censor in the eyes of God, using the personal jurisdiction of self respect (260–1).

What is the warrant for self respect? It is the privilege of lay-ministry which Milton has been exercising in these very pamphlets and which, once the times permit, he hopes to exercise in immortal verse. Just as man 'is called by the high calling of God to be holy and pure, so is he by the same appointment ordained, and by the Church's call admitted, to such offices of discipline in the Church to which his own spiritual gifts by the example of Apostolic institution have authorized him. . . . this and nothing sooner will open his eyes to a wise and true valuation of himself, which is so requisite and high a point of Christianity . . . the functions of Church government ought to be free and open to any Christian man, though never so laic, if his capacity, his faith and prudent demeanour commend him' (261–3). This conviction, perhaps prompted originally by the nature of his poetic aspirations, is now a fundamental part of Milton's thinking; and as he had followed it from negative Puritanism to an affirmation of Presbyterianism, so he would later, with irresistible logic, embrace Independency and, at last, pure individualism in religious belief.

Meanwhile, his ideas on Church discipline were coloured by certain basic convictions about discipline itself. To the prelatical argument that ecclesiastical government was not completely prescribed in the Gospel, he replied that God would not leave to human discretion any aspect of so vital a matter as discipline.

> For there is not that thing in the world of more grave and urgent importance throughout the whole life of man than is discipline. . . . the flourishing and decaying of all civil societies, all the moments and turnings of human occasions are moved to and fro as upon the axle of discipline, so that whatsoever power or sway in mortal things weaker men have attributed to Fortune, I durst with more confidence (the honour of Divine Providence ever saved) ascribe either to the vigour or the slackness of discipline. Nor is there any sociable perfection in this life, civil or sacred, that can be above discipline, but she is that which with her musical chords preserves and holds all the parts thereof together. . . . And certainly discipline is not only the removal of disorder but, if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of virtue . . . Yea, the angels themselves, in whom no disorder is feared, as the Apostle that saw them in his rapture describes, are distinguished and quaternioned into their celestial princedoms and satrapies, according as God Himself hath writ His imperial decrees through the great provinces of heaven. [184–5]

When Adam aspired above his order, to the disturbance of discipline, paradise was lost. This was the meaning of the Fall. Milton believed in liberty, but not liberty which broke the bounds of discipline. There was freedom enough to be had within the harmonious sphere of heavenly order; outside lay licence, the unlovely realm beyond paradise. The divine beauty of order was reason enough for man's obedience, and to reason further was an abuse of reason.

Holding such views, and confident that the impending reformation of the Church was within God's discipline, Milton was unimpressed by the warning that religious freedom would bring a deluge of innumerable sects. New sects and schisms, even the rebellion in Ireland, were but symptoms of the hastening of reformation. Let Episcopacy be ended, and not a rabble of sects but a unanimous multitude of good Protestants would then join the true Church. Milton suspected that this prelatical argument was largely another case of scandalous misnaming. The early Protestants had been called Lollards and Hussites; until recently, reformed Christians were called Puritans;[81] and now, the word Puritan evidently quashed, those in opposition to prelacy are Brownists, Familists, Anabaptists. Common sense suggested that one had better look through these names into the things themselves, remembering that in their times the primitive Christians were accounted Familists and Adamites or worse (213–17). On the whole, Milton was inclined to dismiss this talk of sects as 'partly the mere fictions and false alarms of the prelates'; but if the threat was real, it should then be accepted as a challenge to reforming zeal: 'sects and errors it seems God suffers to be for the glory of good men, that the world may know and reverence their true fortitude and undaunted constancy in the truth. Let us not, therefore, make these things an incumbrance or an excuse of our delay in reforming, which God sends us as an incitement to proceed with more honour and alacrity. For if there were no opposition, where were the trial of an unfeigned goodness and magnanimity?' (222–3). Milton was armed with principles, if sects should raise their ugly heads—as, with bewildering suddenness, sects were soon to do.

In 1654, reviewing his previous efforts as a pamphleteer, Milton declared that in 1641 he had realized men to be in the right way to all forms of liberty, for 'if discipline originating in religion continued its course to the morals and institutions of the commonwealth, they were proceeding in a direct line from such beginnings, from such steps, to the deliverance of the whole life of mortal man from slavery'.[82] In *The Reason of Church Government* he asserted that 'the property of Truth is, where she is publicly taught, to unyoke and set free the minds and spirits of a nation first from the thralldom of sin and superstition—after which all honest and legal freedom of civil life cannot be long absent' (272).

Confident that Church reform was not far distant, he even ventured a suggestion—derived partly from his reading, partly from his Italian experiences—for the public management of recreation:

> because the spirit of man cannot demean itself lively in this body without some recreating intermission of labour and serious things, it were happy for the commonwealth if our magistrates, as in those famous governments of old, would take into their care . . . the managing of our public sports and festival pastimes, that they might be . . . such as may inure and harden our bodies by martial exercises to all warlike skill and performance, and may civilize, adorn, and make discreet

> our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent academies, and the procurement of wise and artful recitations sweetened with eloquent and graceful enticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance, and fortitude, instructing and bettering the nation at all opportunities . . . Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemn panegyries, in theatres, porches, or what other place or way may win most upon the people to receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in authority consult. [239–40]

The proposal to transplant the Florentine academies was, if impracticable, perhaps inevitable after Milton's enthusiastic observation of them. His hint that the theatres might be sponsored by the state was, however, still more radical; within the year the Puritans were to close the theatres, and he could hardly have been unaware of the current hostility toward drama. His own convictions were squarely opposed to the attitude of his age. In this same pamphlet he boldly included drama among the literary forms which he was considering; and in his Commonplace Book, at about this time, he wrote out his objections to the arguments against drama expressed by Lactantius: 'He does not seem even once to have reflected that, while the corrupting influence of the theatre should be eliminated, it is not therefore necessary to eliminate the performance of plays. This, on the contrary, would be altogether senseless, for what in the whole of philosophy is more impressive, purer, or more uplifting than a noble tragedy—what more helpful to a survey at a glance of the hazards and changes of human life?'[83] It would be foolish to close the theatres; it would be wise to manage them for the public good. Moreover, Milton was ready to provide them with great dramas.

*The Reason of Church Government* opens with the Platonic assertion that persuasion is a more effective and a 'more manlike way to keep men in obedience' than is fear. The proposal to use art for both recreation and instruction is of a piece with this conviction. In fact, Milton's conception of true poetry, also expressed in this pamphlet, embodies the same Renaissance beliefs. The poet is an artist who teaches 'over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example, with such delight (to those especially of soft and delicious temper who will not so much as look upon Truth herself unless they see her elegantly dressed) that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they would then appear to all men both easy and pleasant though they were rugged and difficult indeed' (239). Poetry thus delightful and didactic is 'not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs' (241). Artists so equipped realize, of course, what is 'the main consistence of a true poem, the choice of such persons as they ought to introduce, and what is moral and decent to each one' (239). Poetry, therefore, is the verbal marriage of virtue and enjoyment; it refreshes while it edifies. Milton was sure of his purpose, though still seeking appropriate subjects.

*The Reason of Church Government* was published in January or February of 1642,[84] and its author was proud to allow his name to appear on its title page. On 30 December ten of the bishops, including Hall, had joined Laud as prisoners in the Tower; and Milton noted the fact, with grim pleasure, in the closing pages of his pamphlet. Reformation seemed as certain as tomorrow, and tomorrow's poet returned to his literary plans, doubtless with a sigh of relief.

His leisure was short-lived. In 1642, probably soon after 25 March, there appeared an anonymous answer to his *Animadversions* against Hall, entitled *A Modest Confutation of a Slanderous and Scurrilous Libell.*[85] Milton was outraged by the nature of this attack, which not only expressed pious horror over the 'lewd profanations, scurrilous jests, slanderous and reproachful calumnies' found in *Animadversions*, but also called upon all Christians who knew the author to 'stone him to death'. The preface to the reader opened as follows:

> If thou hast any general or particular concernment in the affairs of these times, or but natural curiosity, thou art acquainted with the late and hot bickerings between the Prelates and Smectymnuans. To make up the breaches of whose solemn scenes (it were too ominous to say tragical) there is thrust forth upon the stage, as also to take the ear of the less intelligent, a scurrilous mime, a personated and (as himself thinks) a grim, lowering, bitter fool. I have no further notice of him than he hath been pleased in his immodest and injurious libel to give of himself, and, therefore, as our industrious critics for want of clearer evidence concerning the life and manners of some revived authors, must fetch his character from some scattered passages in his own writings.

The *Animadversions* had been anonymous, and the anonymous rebuttal pretended to deduce Milton's character from the language of his pamphlet—from 'internal evidence', as it were. However unfair, this kind of reply was ironically appropriate in the circumstances, and the writer was, of course, only half-serious in his inferences, but no other response could have been more shrewdly calculated to infuriate Milton, who failed to find anything funny in the 'grim laughter' of impiety, and who had smarted for months under oral censure of his pamphleteering efforts against Ussher and Hall.

Indeed, the inferential 'character' drawn by the writer of the *Confutation* contained several chance remarks that caused Milton genuine concern. On the basis of page thirteen of the *Animadversions*, he pretended to believe that its author had 'spent his youth in loitering, bezelling, and harlotting'. This was patently absurd, but, to round it off, the confutant concluded: 'Thus, being grown to an impostume in the breast of the University, he was at length vomited out thence into a suburb sink about London.' By 'vomited out' the satirist may have meant nothing more than 'graduated', but to Milton, who had probably been punished with rustication, the words were a slap in the face which demanded rebuttal of some sort. Furthermore, in 1642 he was actually living in a suburb or, at least, outside the city walls; and although the neighbourhood was quite respectable,[86] the confutant seemed to be defaming it specifically.

Milton was not too indignant to realize that the writer of the *Confutation* really knew little or nothing about him, and that most of the shots were aimed wildly. If his opponent tried to get ammunition about his private life (as Milton was 'credibly informed' he had) and met with small comfort in the attempt, it was a matter of congratulation to all 'good men' (296). The confutant was apparently unaware of the two earliest pamphlets and the signed *Reason of Church Government*, and thought he was dealing with some 'small clerk' over-eager for a lectureship. Milton also realized that people in general did not care whether John Milton, citizen, 'were thus or thus'—that the great events of the age had dwarfed individual concerns (283). He knew, moreover, that he would lose no personal reputation if he met slander with silence and sufferance, as many another good Christian had done, or was then doing. The *Confutation* did not name him, and the *Animadversions*, as noted above, had been anonymous.

Why, then, did he bother to interrupt his studies once more and, in a savagely resentful mood, answer this babbler, this rude scavenger, this loose railer, this hip-shot grammarian, this obscure thorn-eater of malice and distraction?[87]

There were two good reasons for the urgent composition of *An Apology against a Pamphlet call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus*.[88] The first concerned those readers who did not know Milton personally. To all such, slander against the anonymous author of the *Animadversions* was, in effect, vilification of the truth there advocated and a reflection upon the Smectymnuans. Consequently, said Milton, 'I conceived myself to be now, not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded', and those readers who had found time to hear the author of *Animadversions* defamed should 'be so good and so patient as to hear the same person not unneedfully defended' (283–4). Milton might be thought of small moment, but his cause was not.

The second reason concerned those who knew him either personally or by repute. Although he had sense enough not to take too seriously his opponent's erratic mixture of pure invention and satiric inference, he was nevertheless sensitive about his new public character, so carefully presented in the recent *Reason of Church Government* and now in some danger of being misinterpreted. As a promised poet and a Renaissance man of letters, his public character was an important matter, inseparable from anything he might write. Indeed, it should complement the exemplary qualities of his art. 'How he should be truly eloquent who is not withal a good man, I see not', said Milton (287); and elsewhere in the *Apology* he gave his earnest conviction 'that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy' (303–4). Such a writer could not afford to remain silent when publicly charged with 'beastliness' and indecorous language. The pattern of a public character was a delicate thing. While it could not escape the rancour of an evil tongue, its creator was not debarred from giving 'a more true account of myself abroad' (283).

Although suspecting that the attack was 'not without some subtlety' in provoking him to sing his own praises (296), Milton met the challenge boldly. Again explaining his motives for entering the controversy, he denied that it was presumptuous in him to be confident of the truth, to acknowledge gratefully his many gifts of God's imparting, and 'not to defraud of due esteem' the studious labours of his youth (282). He insisted that the age or fame of his adversaries was irrelevant—that he should be judged solely on the reasonableness of his arguments. Having been taxed with levity in discussion of religious matters, he retorted that Hall had set the example and, following it, he had been no 'more warm than was meet' in any part of the *Animadversions* (286–7). On the contrary, he was more justified in using tart rhetoric than Hall had been, since 'indignation against men, and their actions notoriously bad, hath leave and authority ofttimes to utter such words and phrases as in common talk were not so mannerly to use' (316). Defending this thesis at some length, he cited not only classical oratory, Luther, and the prophets of old, but also the vehement and 'unseemly' speech of Christ in the New Testament and of God in the Old. Milton was stung by the charge of using foul language; he was at great pains to make clear his conception of 'decorum' in the expression of righteous scorn. The elegant reader must distinguish between language used by a fishwife and the same language used, for noble purposes, by a conscious stylist. As though to reassure the elegant reader, Milton begged leave 'to soar a while as the poets use' when he described the trampling power of Christian zeal (313–14).

Throughout the *Apology* he lost no opportunity to show himself both well informed and proficient in regard to literary matters. He criticized the metrics and the style of Hall's *Toothless Satires*, mocked Hall's claim to be the first English satirist, and referred the bishop to *Piers Plowman* as both earlier and better. Hall did not seem to realize that 'a satire, as it was born out of a tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage, to strike high and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons, and not to creep into every blind taphouse that fears a constable more than a satire. But that such a poem should be toothless, I still affirm it to be a bull, taking away the essence of that which it calls itself; for if it bite neither the persons nor the vices, how is it a satire, and if it bite either, how is it toothless? So that toothless satires are as much as if he had said toothless teeth' (329).

Milton knew Hall's mannerisms, not only in satire, but also in pamphleteering, and he exposed their weaknesses unmercifully. As for the style of the *Modest Confutation*, he treated it with amused contempt, from the immodest title to the overdressed margins. The confutant had crammed his margins with pretentious citations, and, not content with the usual room, had 'cut out large docks and creeks into his text to unlade the foolish frigate of his unseasonable authorities' (334).[89] Milton lectured him on his lack of decorum in referring to Parliament as a 'convocation', and laughed at his understandably half-hearted praise of the prelate-punishing lawmakers. It would be a digression, but Milton would even show the confutant 'what he might have better said in their praise' (333–4). There followed a long and eloquent eulogy, couched in the rolling, sonorous style which the confutant had called 'big-mouthed' when he met it in the prayer in *Animadversions*—a style suitable, according to its master, for 'a hymn in prose' (343). Here are some broken glimpses of this dress parade of rhetoric and patriotism:

> Nor did they deceive that expectation which with the eyes and desires of their country was fixed upon them; for no sooner did the force of so much united excellence meet in one globe of brightness and efficacy, but, encountering the dazzled resistance of tyranny, they gave not over, though their enemies were strong and subtle, till they had laid her groveling upon the fatal block, with one stroke winning again our lost liberties and charters which our forefathers after so many battles could scarce maintain. . . . notwithstanding all the treasonous plots against them, all the rumours either of rebellion or invasion, they have not been yet brought to change their constant resolution ever to think fearlessly of their own safeties, and hopefully of the commonwealth—which hath gained them such an admiration from all good men that now they hear it as their ordinary surname to be saluted the Fathers of their country, and sit as gods among daily petitions and public thanks flowing in upon them. [337, 339]

Milton admitted this to be a *tour de force*, but he insisted upon its inherent sincerity: 'Although I cannot say that I am utterly untrained in those rules which best rhetoricians have given, or unacquainted with those examples which the prime authors of eloquence have written in any learned tongue, yet true eloquence I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth; and that whose mind soever is fully possessed with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words (by what I can express) like so many nimble and airy servitors trip about him at command, and in well-ordered files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places' (362). Live nobly, and noble speech will be added unto you.

Milton was at pains, in the *Apology*, to manifest the moral eloquence of his own life. The silly slanders of the *Confutation* gave him an excuse for mentioning his repute at the University, his present haunts and habits, and, most revealing of all, his reflections on chastity and virtue in the course of his reading through the years.[90] This record of his innermost thoughts was not altogether ingenuous, for while its ostensible purpose was to counter insinuations of bordello-frequenting, it also served notice that Milton was a true poet—by his own high definition. Elsewhere in the pamphlet, in scattered passages, he included ample proof of his purely technical skill. He even stated, with simple candour, that he possessed 'an ear that could measure a just cadence, and scan without articulating' (328). God had given him an inward witness and warrant of what he had to do, tomorrow.

More than any of its predecessors the *Apology* is a pamphlet of great stylistic variety, as though its author was deliberately exhibiting the many facets of his skill. There is playful irony, as when Milton introduces his remarks on Hall's satires by saying, 'The doings will be rough and dangerous' (327). There is rough-and-tumble logic, as when the confutant is asked how he recognized Milton's use of the language of bordellos (299). There are laughter and learning and a dozen styles of eloquence. Again Milton defends the wisdom and understanding of the common people, arguing that they can judge a minister even though kept in ignorance by prelates. Again he attacks ceremonies and the Romish liturgy; again he pleads for personal prayer. He confesses, and explains, his fragmentary knowledge of the Church councils; he damns, for the fifth time, the argument from antiquity. Summarizing his earlier remarks on freedom of the press, he makes a judicious restatement: 'A more free permission of writing at some times might be profitable, in such a question especially wherein the magistrates are not fully resolved, and both sides have equal liberty to write, as now they have. . . . anger thus freely vented spends itself ere it break out into action' (321).[91] All in all, he fulfils his promise to answer his opponent and, at the same time, 'be useful in something' to his readers.

It is a significant commentary upon the reception of the autobiographical *Apology* and the partly autobiographical *Reason of Church Government* that unsold copies of both of these tracts were reissued under a new title page about 1654, twelve years later, when their author had received some measure of fame. The publisher who thus sought a return on his seemingly worthless stock was John Rothwell, and one wonders how he fared. He did not venture a second edition of the two, nor did anyone else in Milton's lifetime, or until twenty-three years after his death. Apparently there was not enough interest.[92]

The *Apology* brought to an end Milton's first period of controversial writing. He was none too happy about the year's work, which had plainly differed from what he had anticipated. In the company of 'these wretched projectors of ours that bescrawl their pamphlets every day with new forms of government for our church'—his own description of his fellow writers—he had felt distinctly uncomfortable, for theirs was grotesquely unlike the 'industry of the learned Salmasius' and other true scholars on ecclesiastical matters.[93] On the other hand, he was more than ever confident about his future as a poet, and, in that confidence, had gone so far as to promise great things to come. The English people, whose deeds he waited to celebrate fittingly, through their new Parliament could be relied upon to achieve reformation and establish liberty. He did not define the nature of that reformation or the nature of that liberty, but spoke of both in optimistic and theoretical language. He was definite only in his argument that Episcopacy was not the divinely ordained discipline for the Church. As for the 'one right discipline', he believed that there is a pattern of Church government immutably proclaimed in Scripture, and he agreed with Smectymnuus that Presbyterianism suited the pattern.

Unity was necessary to the Church, and it could come through free cooperation. As for men like Falkland and Digby, who discerned the seeds of future tyranny in such unqualified opinions, they were timid politicians to the enthusiastic Milton. His mood was prophetic and his faith was uncritical; he failed to see the implications of his own deepest convictions, such as his expressed belief in the Christian privileges of the layman. His fervent theory of spiritual and poetical illumination led him to damn Episcopacy for destroying the dignity of the individual; but it never occurred to him that this involved the principle of freedom of conscience—the principle which eventually would contribute to the downfall of Puritanism. He was then neither an extremist nor even a profound thinker. He was a learned and eloquent Christian who wanted to eliminate the bishops and get on with his poetry.

Blessed once more with leisure, he was bothered by the selection of a speaker for the prologue of his projected drama on 'Adam Unparadised'. First he thought of Moses, then the angel Gabriel. It was probably in 1642, after completing his *Apology*, that he made a new sketch (now lost) and decided to begin the play with a speech by the rebellious Lucifer. He even composed the beginning of the soliloquy:

> O Thou that with surpassing glory crowned
> Lookest from Thy sole dominion like the god
> Of this new world, at whose sight all the stars

Hide their diminished heads, to Thee I call,
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down
Warring in Heaven against Heaven's matchless King.

These ten lines pleased him so well that he showed them to his young pupils, John and Edward Phillips. Edward never forgot; the moment must have seemed to him charged with special importance; and many years later he recognized these same lines near the beginning of the fourth book of an epic entitled *Paradise Lost*.[94]

# 8. Separation, 1642–1645

MILTON's pamphlet quarrel with the bishops, his first taste of public controversy, had more or less occupied his mind for a period of about twelve months. For the first time, he had enjoyed the satisfaction of putting his knowledge and skill to practical use. For the first time, he had experimented with various forms of prose. He had been busy, extremely busy. The sheer labour of composition had consumed countless hours; reading and research had made unexpected demands upon his leisure. Nevertheless, during this same period he had continued the training of John and Edward Phillips, trying out his personal theories of education. And always, in the back or forefront of his mind, he had nourished his exciting new plans for poetry. Once, when he had been at work on his *Reason of Church Government*, those plans for poetry had seemed so compelling that he had allowed them to obtrude themselves into religious controversy.

Milton had a persistent need to set his house in order. He was always ready to deal with important problems as they arose, fitting new elements into his life's pattern, but he rarely lost sight of the pattern. Its requirements were strict: talents must be well employed; life must be fulfilled; there was a time for everything. His travels behind him, his contributions to religious liberty amply made, his future writing plans forming, he finally began to think seriously of marriage as necessary to round out his experience.

As proof that his custom of life was far from licentious, he had offered in his *Apology* a chronological account of his thoughts on personal morality through the course of his years and studies. This circumscribed but most revealing summary (which I examined in the chapter on his final years at Cambridge) he had concluded thus:

> from the laureate fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy, but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato and his equal, Xenophon. Where if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love (I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy; the rest are cheated with a thick, intoxicating potion which a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about), and how the first and chiefest office of love begins

> and ends in the soul, producing those happy twins of her divine generation, knowledge and virtue—with such abstracted sublimities as these it might be worth your listening, readers, as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time, when there shall be no chiding . . .[1]

Moral discipline learned from the noblest philosophy, and a certain reservedness of natural disposition, were sufficient to insure continence. But he had also been thoroughly trained from childhood in the precepts of Christianity; and

> having had the doctrine of holy Scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infused, that 'the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body', thus also I argued to myself: that if unchastity in a woman, whom Saint Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflowering and dishonourable, in that he sins both against his own body, which is the perfecter sex, and his own glory, which is in the woman, and that which is worst, against the image and glory of God, which is in himself. Nor did I slumber over that place expressing such high rewards of ever accompanying the Lamb, with those celestial songs to others inapprehensible, but not to those who were not defiled with women (which doubtless means fornication, for marriage must not be called a defilement).

No, marriage must not be called a defilement; and in answer to a wild guess about his marriage intentions, Milton was perfectly willing to state one of his convictions publicly: 'I think with them who both in prudence and elegance of spirit would choose a virgin of mean fortunes honestly bred, before the wealthiest widow.'[2] He had thought a good deal about what he wanted in a wife. At thirty-three he was still a bachelor, high-minded, fastidious, and lonely. A nation's liberty, he announced in 1641, involved 'rigorous honour to the Marriage Bed, which in both sexes should be bred up from chaste hopes to loyal enjoyments'.[3]

His 'chaste hopes' and ideals of love and marriage were compounded of many factors: among them his reading, his observations of happy domesticity, his devotion to self-discipline, his deep need for understanding. Among them, too, was his ignorance of women.

During the Hammersmith days he had felt the 'potent inclination, and inbred, which about this time of a man's life solicits most, the desire of house and family of his own'.[4] But marriage was incompatible with the Hammersmith and Horton purpose, and any association which encouraged matrimony was dangerous. Milton learned to take pride in keeping low and obedient the demands of the flesh; he found that 'frugal diet', 'strict life and labour', 'mutual and easy curbs which are in the power of any temperate man', were proof against 'a sublunary and bestial burning'. Having mastered his own masculinity, he became more than ever persuaded that the 'burning' mentioned by St. Paul, in his recommendation of marriage, was 'certainly not the mere motion of carnal lust, not the mere goad of a sensitive desire. God does not principally take care for such cattle. What is it then but . . . the desire and longing to put off an unkindly solitariness by uniting another body (but not without a fit soul) to his in the cheerful society of wedlock?' The satisfaction of sex could not be the chief end of holy matrimony. Let 'gross and vulgar apprehensions conceit but low of matrimonial purposes, and in the work of male and female think they have all'; Milton had a loftier conception of marriage. 'Fleshly accustoming without the souls' union and commixture of intellectual delight' was 'rather a soiling than a fulfilling of marriage-rites.'[5]

What is true love? Only a gentle and spacious spirit can answer. And Milton knew. Love is a pure and more inbred desire of joining to itself in conjugal fellowship a fit conversing soul. Solace and peace, therefore, are the main benefits of conjugal society. Marriage is the divine remedy of man's loneliness, the ordinance of his contentment, instituted by God to comfort and refresh His creature against the evil of solitary life, through the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman. Wedlock brings, of course, a benevolent and intimate communion of body, but its chief society is rather in the soul; its dignity and blessing lie in the mutual enjoyment of that which the wanting soul needfully seeks, not that which the plenteous body would joyfully give away. The cheerful help that may be in marriage toward sanctity of life is the purest and, hence, the noblest end of that contract. Indeed, peace and love are the best subsistence of a Christian family, the inward knot of marriage; their pure influence springs from the soul's lawful contentment, their only fountain. To insure this serene and blissful condition, the wife should bring a sociable and helpful attitude. She should be an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate. Her duty is to make possible a cheerful and agreeable conversation, thus preventing loneliness to the mind and spirit of man. A free and lightsome, meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and the noblest end of marriage.[6]

These were the ideals that Milton held. 'As for the custom that some parents and guardians have of forcing marriages, it will be better to say nothing of such a savage inhumanity.'[7] True marriage results only from true love, that intellectual and innocent desire which God Himself has kindled. Milton was somewhat vague, almost mystical, in his attitude toward the *recognition* of this unforced 'desire': 'There is a hidden efficacy of love and hatred in man as well as in other kinds, not moral but natural, which though not always in the choice, yet in the success of marriage will ever be most predominant . . . But what might be the cause, whether each one's allotted Genius or proper Star, or whether the supernal influence of schemes and angular aspects, or this elemental *crasis* here below—whether all these jointly or singly meeting friendly or unfriendly in either party, I dare not . . . appear so much a philosopher as to conjecture.'[8] A Christian could take comfort in the thought that 'God's doing ever is to bring the due likenesses and harmonies of His works together.'

These were the ideals that Milton held; these were the fragile heights from which he fell. Broken, puzzled, numb with disillusion, he was to cry from the bottom of his hurt: 'As no man apprehends what vice is so well as he who is truly virtuous, no man knows hell like him who converses most in heaven, so there is none that can estimate the evil and the affliction of a natural hatred in matrimony unless he have a soul gentle enough and spacious enough to contemplate what is true love.'[9] His marriage was not made in heaven. It was made in Oxfordshire, and much too hurriedly.

In 1642 Milton's income was largely, if not entirely, from investments made by his father, and one such investment, which brought him £12 per annum, was a loan of £150 which had been made on 1 February 1638 to Sir John Cope of Hanwell, Oxfordshire. Although Sir John had died in October of 1638, while Milton was in Italy, the interest on the loan had been paid regularly from his estate till the end of 1641. However, in February 1642, when the quarterly interest of £3 was again due, no payment was forthcoming. The family defaulted again in May. Milton, we may be sure, was worried about this unexpected, if slight, decrease in his income.[10]

Another such investment, which brought him £12 semi-annually, was a loan of £300 which his father had made as long ago as 1627 to a Mr. Richard Powell of Forest Hill, also in Oxfordshire. It had seemed an excellent investment, because Powell had given as security a statute staple bond of £500, and, indeed, the interest of eight per cent. had been faithfully paid for fifteen years. On 12 June 1642 it was again due.[11] In 1642, however, Richard Powell's finances were in a precarious state. Still borrowing money, he was now desperately trying to achieve solvency by dealings in real estate. On 18 January he borrowed about £200 from one Acton Drake. On 28 May he had to pay £110 on account, to protect his home, the manor of Forest Hill, which he had mortgaged to Sir Robert Pye on another loan.[12] It is possible that Milton heard of this situation, or, more likely, Powell may have written him to beg an extension of time on the interest due on 12 June. In any case, as Edward Phillips remembered the date, it was about 29 May, or (and more likely) 'a little after, that he took a journey into the country, nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was any more than a journey of recreation'. Milton was, in fact, travelling to Forest Hill on business. Since he passed through Reading and Oxford on his way, and since his father and Christopher's family were now living in Reading instead of Horton, the journey was also one of pleasure.[13]

Even at Forest Hill the visit proved to be a combination of business and pleasure. The month was June; Milton met and fell in love with Mary, the eldest daughter of Richard Powell. He was thirty-three; she was seventeen.[14] The impetuous courtship took perhaps a month. The poet knew, or thought he knew, that Mary was the lovely ideal of whom he had dreamed. They were married, after so brief an acquaintance, probably early in July.[15]

Milton brought his young bride back to the house in Aldersgate Street, and little Edward Phillips long remembered that some few of her nearest relations came too, that they were all lodged in the small house, and that the feasting and entertainment lasted for some days. Probably Richard Powell and his wife Anne were among these festive guests.[16] (The interest of £12 had been paid; Powell had promised Milton a dowry of £1,000; and in this expansive mood he was taking the measure of his new son-in-law.)[17] Probably a few of Mary's many brothers and sisters also came, to see her new home and to visit the big city. Richard Powell junior was twenty-one, and had studied at both Oxford and the Inner Temple. James was eighteen, and a student at Oxford. Anne was just turned sixteen—and doubtless dreaming of marriage with a handsome poet of her own. Then there were the younger children: Sara, John, William, Archdale, Elizabeth, George, and a second Elizabeth.[18]

Finally the celebration ended, and the Powells returned to Oxfordshire. Mr. and Mrs. Milton were alone, facing the adventure of marriage. Not altogether alone, however, for the education of Edward and John was still his responsibility, and when the guests had departed, the routine of teaching was resumed. The Phillips boys were about the ages of two of Mary's younger brothers, and no doubt she was prepared to assist in their care and training. What she could not have been prepared for was the strict and studious manner of life that obtained in her husband's household. There were regular hours for everything; the meals were frugal; there was little entertainment. At Forest Hill, near Oxford, she had been used to a big house and much company and joviality. (So Edward Phillips soon learned; he was almost twelve.) She was upset when she heard the Phillips boys whipped for disobedience. She missed the freedom and merriment and plenty of the manor at Forest Hill. By the time August came, she was very homesick.[19]

On 13 August King Charles issued a proclamation ordering Oxford University to place the town in a state of defence. 'Trained bands' were hurriedly organized. In London letters came to Aldersgate Street begging that Mary be allowed to return to Forest Hill for the remainder of the summer. (A most unusual request to make of a newly married couple? Phillips thought the letters possibly incited by her own desire.) Whatever the circumstances, Milton let her go. He may have made, by now, a most appalling discovery about his marriage. He had expected the comfort and encouragement of a rare companionship—not intellectual companionship from a girl of seventeen, but something beyond physical intimacy, something beautiful and satisfying. He must have expected, too, as so many older husbands expect, that his wife would welcome the kind of man-made life to which he had grown accustomed. He was not prepared to deal with a lonely wife, perhaps a frightened wife, a wife more immature than he had reckoned from her years. He let her go back to Oxfordshire. Perhaps, foolishly, he told her of his disappointment as he let her go.[20]

She was supposed to return after a month or so. Phillips remembered the appointed time as 29 September or thereabouts—as long a visit as their life thus far together, a strange leave of absence for a bride.[21] In any case, she could not have been gone long before news reached London of a stirring and ominous event. King Charles had raised the royal standard at Nottingham, and all England stood, half believing, on the brink of civil war. The historic date was 22 August. Exactly a month later—and only a week before the time of Mary's expected return to London—the Royalists defeated a Parliamentary force in a skirmish at Powick Bridge.

Mary did not return, and there was no word from Forest Hill. Milton wrote her a letter, but received no answer. He sent several other letters, which were also unanswered. Whatever his reasons, he did not go after her. Instead, fearing that his letters had gone astray in the confusion of the times, he sent a messenger to Forest Hill, bearing an urgent request for her return. As Phillips later remembered it, the messenger reported to Milton that the Powells had dismissed him with some sort of contempt.[22] On 23 October the battle of Edgehill was fought in south Warwickshire, with victory claimed by both sides, and about 5,000 slain. After the battle, on 28 October, the King's forces took up their quarters at Oxford. A few days later they were in Reading, where Christopher Milton was already making himself useful to the Royalist cause.

A marriage which might have survived disappointment and loneliness on both sides was not strong enough to withstand the sudden violence of political antipathies. The Powells were ardent Royalists, and in the closing months of 1642 the Royalists were completely confident of success in the struggle for power. Moreover, travel between London and Forest Hill was increasingly hazardous. On 16 January 1643 there was an order of Commons forbidding traffic with Oxford. Milton sent no more letters. He probably did not know whether Mary's prolonged absence was her own or her family's idea. It would be helpful to learn at what time Richard Powell discovered that his son-in-law was one of the hated Parliamentarians. It would also be helpful to learn at what time Milton discovered that he had married a young Royalist—or, at least, a young woman who naturally sided with her family. He would not have hated her for her political sympathies; he did not hate his own brother, or his brother-in-law Agar, or Henry Lawes, or other Royalist friends. But his wife's desertion, her siding with her parents against her lawful husband, must have seemed to him final proof of a shocking and irreparable flaw in character.

As for Mary, the marriage must have seemed a nightmare, an utterly bewildering mistake.[23]

While Milton was still wondering, and incapable of any sustained effort at composition, he found leisure for poetry as well as for repentance. To this period certainly one, and probably three sonnets belong. The one we can be sure of is a playfully ironic reaction to a serious situation.[24] After the battle of Edgehill, Essex, the Parliament's general, withdrew his army toward Warwick, leaving the approach to London undefended. When the Royalists marched on the capital during the second week of November, there was intense excitement, heightened by rumours of pillage and devastation. On 13 November 1642 the trained bands, reinforced by part of Essex's army, which had managed to arrive in time, concentrated at Turnham Green to defend the city. Milton, living just outside the city walls, watched the growing crisis with mingled feelings. War was no respecter of poets. Yet he remembered how Alexander the Great, in razing Thebes to the ground, was said to have spared the house once occupied by Pindar. And Plutarch told a story of Athens being saved from destruction by the Spartans when someone recited lines from the *Electra* by Euripides. In a spirit of grim jest, the bard-to-be penned an appeal to the officer who might come upon his own house:

> Captain, or Colonel, or knight in arms,
> Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,
> If ever deed of honour did thee please,
> Guard them, and him within protect from harms.
> He can requite thee, for he knows the charms
> That call fame on such gentle acts as these,
> And he can spread thy name o'er lands and seas,
> Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.
> Lift not thy spear against the Muse's bower.
> The great Emathian conqueror bid spare
> The house of Pindarus when temple and tower
> Went to the ground; and the repeated air
> Of sad Electra's poet had the power
> To save th'Athenian walls from ruin bare.

Maybe, in whimsical mood, he actually sent these lines to his good friend, Captain (perhaps already, or soon to be, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Westminster Regiment) John Hobson, who would appreciate—as we are unlikely to do—their wry appropriateness.[25] Only a few words in this sonnet betray the humorous and ironic tone: the 'knight in arms' was practically as obsolete in English warfare as the 'spear' by 1642. One should also notice that both Pindar and Euripides (unlike Milton) were dead and famous when their houses were spared by conquering armies.

The great battle for London never took place. Neither side wanted to attack, and so the Royalists eventually withdrew. It is possible that Milton wrote his sonnet *after* the danger was averted, to amuse his friends. The poem, with its unqualified assumption that the city will be captured by the enemy, would thus be *obviously* ironic, and would gain humour from the feeling of relief and anticlimax which everyone felt.

Another sonnet, kindly in intent but unquestionably serious in tone, may belong to a time soon after this event. We know nothing, unfortunately, of the person to whom it is addressed or the circumstances which prompted it. We can say only that it was written to compliment and encourage a young woman of Milton's acquaintance whose piety and virtue, approved by the poet, were thought priggish by some others. She has shunned the easy way to vice 'in the prime of earliest youth', and now she is 'eminently seen' among 'those few' that seek heavenly truth. Because of her wise decision,

> they that overween
> And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
> No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.

Milton assures her that she will be rewarded as were the wise virgins in the parable.[26]

Still another sonnet of compliment addressed to a woman probably belongs to this period. Long afterwards, Milton's nephew remembered something about its subject: 'Our author, now as it were a single man again, made it his chief diversion now and then in an evening to visit the Lady Margaret Ley, daughter to [James] Ley, Earl of Marlborough. . . . This lady, being a woman of great wit and ingenuity, had a particular honour for him, and took much delight in his company, as likewise her husband, Captain Hobson, a very accomplished gentleman; and what esteem he at the same time had for her appears by a sonnet he made in praise of her . . .' How long Milton had known Lady Margaret is a tantalizing uncertainty; but after her marriage to John Hobson on 30 December 1641 she and her husband lived for two or three years in Aldersgate Street, in the same precinct of St. Botolph's as the poet. Doubtless they comforted him in his loneliness and bewilderment during the time of his wife's absence. Hobson, an officer in the Parliament's army, was a man of about forty-five; and Lady Margaret, too, seems to have been older than Milton, for he wrote to her:

> Though later born than to have known the days
> Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,
> Madam, methinks I see him living yet;
> So well your words his noble virtues praise
> That all both judge you to relate them true
> And to possess them, honoured Margaret.[27]

The civil war continued. The King made his winter headquarters at Oxford, and Essex, the Parliament's general, with headquarters at Windsor, stood ready to repel any second attack on London. Elsewhere there were minor skirmishes; Sir William Waller won the south-eastern counties for Parliament during December, while the Earl of Newcastle was equally energetic on the King's behalf in the northern counties. Peace-loving men still hoped that a major conflict could be averted, and a committee from Parliament travelled to Oxford early in March of 1643 to negotiate. Meanwhile the successful exploits of Rupert and Hopton had increased optimism among Royalists, and the negotiations were broken off on 12 April. Stirred suddenly to activity, Essex laid siege to Reading on 15 April.

When news of the siege reached London, Milton had cause to worry. His own father, and Christopher's family, were shut up in the city. Since Christopher was now a professed Royalist, anything might happen. His wife was again pregnant, expecting her child soon. Reading surrendered on 27 April 1643, and soon afterwards, both Christopher's wife and Milton's father came to London. There was room for the latter in the house in Aldersgate Street and, as Edward Phillips recalled many years later, the old gentleman (now about eighty) was 'wholly retired to his rest and devotion, without the least trouble imaginable'. Christopher did not return to London; he had cast his lot, as a young counsellor at law, with the Royalist party, and he was still hopeful of his party's eventual triumph. His support was rewarded by his appointment as Royal Commissioner of Sequestrations for three counties under the Great Seal at Oxford. Until April of 1646 he was to be very active in the King's cause; we find him at Wells in November 1644, and living in Exeter in the autumn of 1645. His wife, Thomasine, was doubtless given shelter by her mother, the widow Webber. Their son John was baptized at St. Clement Dane's in London on 29 June 1643.[28]

A brother, Milton reflected, 'may be hated zealously, and loved civilly or naturally'. It was a strange time, 'when man and wife were often the fiercest enemies, he at home with the children, she, the mother of the family, in the camp of the enemy threatening death and destruction to her husband'. A strange time indeed, and significant words these, written by Milton a dozen years after Mary departed for the King's headquarters at Oxford, leaving him with John and Edward Phillips. Life was a stern schoolmaster, and he was learning some painful lessons. 'Vainly does he prattle of liberty in assemblies and forum who at home is in servitude most degrading to a man, who even serves an inferior.'[29]

Mary's desertion was a staggering blow to Milton's self-respect. In the pamphlet written immediately before his marriage he had candidly confessed to 'an honest haughtiness and self-esteem either of what I was or what I might be (which let envy call pride)'.[30] He had earlier proclaimed such an attitude to be the basis of noble endeavour:

> if the love of God as a fire sent from heaven to be ever kept alive upon the altar of our hearts be the first principle of all godly and virtuous actions in men, this

> pious and just honouring of our selves is the second, and may be thought as the radical moisture and fountainhead whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth. . . . he that holds himself in reverence and due esteem, both for the dignity of God's image upon him and for the price of his redemption, which he thinks is visibly marked upon his forehead, accounts himself both a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds, and much better worth than to deject and defile with such a debasement and such a pollution as sin is . . . Nor can he fear so much the offence and reproach of others, as he dreads and would blush at the reflection of his own severe and modest eye upon himself, if it should see him doing or imagining that which is sinful, though in deepest secrecy.[31]

Milton was not conscious of having sinned in the débâcle of his marriage, but there was no escaping the fact that he had made an appalling mistake. He had not been trapped; he had not yielded to great temptation; he had simply shown poor judgement. Human nature was a frail thing, and Milton was discovering, at long last, his common humanity.

It was not a pleasant discovery. His self-respect cried for restoration. He was not long in telling himself: 'For all the wariness can be used, it may yet befall a discreet man to be mistaken in his choice, and we have plenty of examples. The soberest and best governed men are least practised in these affairs . . . nor is there that freedom of access granted or presumed as may suffice to a perfect discerning till too late; and where any indisposition is suspected, what more usual than the persuasion of friends that acquaintance, as it increases, will amend all. And lastly, it is not strange though many who have spent their youth chastely are in some things not so quick-sighted, while they haste too eagerly to light the nuptial torch.'[32] There was fellowship in such folly, and the folly, moreover, was neither vicious nor sinful. A man was blameless for yielding to an innocent and natural inclination, even though its consequence was disastrous. Mistakes could be excused. But what remedy for the consequence? What of the future?

The future was dark. Divorce was impossible under the law unless frigidity or adultery could be proved, and neither was here involved. Despite the law, Puritan theory and practice occasionally permitted divorce on grounds of desertion, and, eventually, this might be the solution.[33] The law itself was cruel, even ironic. The English accounted 'no reproach more abominable than to be nicknamed the husband of an adultress', to be called a cuckold; yet the law demanded that a man endure this ignoble sufferance, this unmanly indignity, before he could be divorced from his wife. There was another irony: the law was based upon a literal reading of the words of Christ: 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery'; yet the Church itself had added an exception in granting divorce for frigidity. If this exception was allowable, why not others?[34] And why this particular exception? Did the Church believe the physical relationship in marriage to be more important than spiritual and intellectual compatibility?

Milton's ideals of what marriage should be, and could be, were unshaken, perhaps even strengthened, by his personal tragedy. He was unalterably convinced that God had ordained marriage primarily as a comfort and refreshment to the lonely spirit of man, with physical union and the work of procreation as a secondary purpose. 'Yet now, if any two be but once handed in the Church and have tasted in any sort the nuptial bed, let them find themselves never so mistaken in their dispositions through any error, concealment, or misadventure, that through their different tempers, thoughts, and constitutions they can neither be to one another a remedy against loneliness nor live in any union or contentment all their days, yet they shall, so they be but found suitably weaponed to the least possibility of sensual enjoyment, be made, spite of antipathy to fadge together, and combine as they may to their unspeakable wearisomeness and despair of all sociable delight in the ordinance which God established to that very end.'[35] Such calamities simply could not accord with God's purpose. They were inconsistent with the sanctity of marriage, the dignity of man, and the goodness of Christianity. The original institution, no matter what the Church thought, could not have been 'so rebellious against both nature and reason as to exalt itself above the end and person for whom it was instituted'. 'It is not good', God has said, 'that man should be alone'; yet no loneliness is worse than the solitude in an unfortunate marriage. 'There is no Christian duty that is not to be seasoned and set off with cheerfulness', but if man 'shall be forced to love against a possibility, and to use dissimulation against his soul', the futility and hypocrisy of his position crushes 'the very foundation of his inmost nature' and makes cheerfulness a mockery.[36]

Pursuing such thoughts Milton found, no doubt, some relief from his personal distress. During the first half of 1643 he interested himself in the general problem of divorce. By exercising his God-given intelligence, and by careful study of the Bible, it should be possible, he thought, to find a defensible solution to this great human dilemma. His individual problem sent him searching for first principles.

No other endeavour could have been more characteristic of Milton. He transmuted and lessened his own difficulty by generalizing it. A few years before, with no thought of directly personal gain, he had attacked Episcopacy because he had been 'church-outed' by the prelates. Now, without reference to his own peculiar case, he made a general assault upon the Canon Laws governing marriage, because he himself had been marriage-outed by Mary Powell. In both instances he stood to profit indirectly; in both instances he lifted the argument to the level of principles, and sought the profit of all humanity. In advocating a good cause, every man must start somewhere; and Milton's advocacy of causes usually started from the wall into which he had unexpectedly bumped. He started there, but he never stayed there; he soon staggered back to the common battlefield where human liberties are decided, and he fought with the universal weapons of eloquence and reason. Thus to objectify personal feeling was a necessity with Milton. In poetry he achieved it by pouring emotion into a rigid form and by ordering its expression in terms of rhetorical convention. In prose he achieved the same transmutation by generalizing, by scrupulously avoiding reference to specific cases, by limiting his argument to broad statements of principle. Always, to him, the individual's emotions were unimportant, but the individual's reasoning, God-directed, was important indeed.

He returned to the Bible for light. In *Of Reformation*, while conceding that some places in the Scriptures remain clouded, he had declared that everything 'which is most necessary to be known is most easy, and that which is most difficult, so far expounds itself ever as to tell us how little it imports our saving knowledge'.[37] He now discovered that this confident statement was born of inexperience. To be sure, the law of Moses permitted divorce for reasons besides adultery: 'When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her, let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house' (Deut. xxiv. 1). The Hebrew can be translated 'uncleanness' or 'any real nakedness', and this must refer, he reasoned, to the mind as well as to the body. Here, then, was divorce allowed for mental and spiritual incompatibility, as well as for physical defectiveness.[38] But Christ had said to the Pharisees: 'Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, who so shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and who so marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery' (Matthew xix. 8–9). Was this not plain contradiction, the supersedure of one law by another?

It seemed to be; it had been accepted as such; and yet it could not be. The words of Christ, interpreted literally, were *not in the spirit of Christ*, because, Milton reasoned, they made the mild grace of the Gospel more strict than the strict law of Moses. They were also against human nature and the ideal purposes of marriage, for 'marriage is a covenant the very being whereof consists, not in a forced cohabitation and counterfeit performance of duties, but in unfeigned love and peace'.[39] Like religion, like the worship of God, marriage was not a matter of superficial appearances. Milton had hated Episcopacy for its emphasis upon externalities and material things, its tyrannical treatment of the individual Christian. Now he hated the Canon Law for these same indignities.

Continuing to ponder the problem, he eventually came to feel that its key must be Christ's rule of charity. Charity had been given as an interpretation and guide for our faith. The words of Christ on divorce, therefore, could not have been intended literally. The more he studied the passage in which they occurred, the more he seemed to realize their limited application, their tone of special rebuke to those who had abused the law of Moses. The Pharisees were the hard of heart, the committers of adultery, and Christ's words, then, were a reproach to such, not a new law for mankind. It was all suddenly clear. To him, John Milton, the long-lost meaning of many passages of Scripture had been revealed. 'Through the help of that illuminating Spirit' which had favoured him, the obscurities and contradictions had finally been resolved.[40]

Once in possession of what he felt to be the truth, Milton reflected on the causes of its disappearance for so many ages. Man was forever losing paradise. 'For though it were granted us by divine indulgence to be exempt from all that can be harmful to us from without, yet the perverseness of our folly is so bent that we should never lin [i.e., leave off] hammering out of our own hearts, as it were out of a flint, the seeds and sparkles of new misery to ourselves, till all were in a blaze again. And no marvel if out of our own hearts, for they are evil, but even out of those things which God meant us either for a principal good or a pure contentment we are still hatching and contriving upon ourselves matter of continual sorrow and perplexity.' Milton had learned something about the ways of God to men: 'They are equal, easy, and not burdensome; nor do they ever cross the just and reasonable desires of men, nor involve this our portion of mortal life into a necessity of sadness and malcontent by laws commanding over the unreducible antipathies of nature sooner or later found; but allow us to remedy and shake off those evils into which human error hath led us through the midst of our best intentions.' If this had not been realized, it was because men had persisted in being over-rigorous, through faintness of heart, and 'where He set us in a fair allowance of way with honest liberty and prudence to our guard, we never leave subtilizing and casuisting till we have straitened and pared that liberal path into a razor's edge to walk on, between a precipice of unnecessary mischief on either side: and starting at every false alarm, we do not know which way to set a foot forward with manly confidence and Christian resolution, through the confused ringing in our ears of panic scruples and amazements'.[41]

Mankind should beware unnecessary repressions; they are unhealthy, and psychologically dangerous:

> Let not therefore the frailty of man go on thus inventing needless troubles to itself, to groan under the false imagination of a strictness never imposed from above, enjoining that for duty which is an impossible and vain supererogating. 'Be not righteous overmuch', is the counsel of Ecclesiastes; 'why shouldst thou destroy thyself?' Let us not be thus overcurious to strain at atoms, and yet to stop every vent and cranny of permissive liberty, lest nature, wanting those needful pores and breathing-places which God hath not debarred our weakness, either suddenly break out into some wide rupture of open vice, and frantic heresy, or else inwardly fester with repining and blasphemous thoughts . . .

With these words Milton, in effect, said a final farewell to one aspect of Puritanism, and at the same time saved himself from morbid repression by acknowledging, and accepting, his own weakness. He also came surprisingly close to anticipating much of what a later age would call psychoanalysis. Needless repression, he saw, was responsible for many 'obscure and giddy sects'. He was not unsympathetic with these people, now that he had a glimpse of their reason for being, and he thought that their case was worth the study of men skilful in 'the reason of things':

> seeing that sort of men who follow Anabaptism, Familism, Antinomianism, and other fanatic dreams (if we understand them not amiss) be such most commonly as are by nature addicted to religion, of life also not debauched, and that their opinions having full swing do end in satisfaction of the flesh, it may be come with reason into the thoughts of a wise man whether all this proceed not partly, if not chiefly, from the restraint of some lawful liberty which ought to be given men and is denied them—as by physick we learn, in menstruous bodies, where nature's current hath been stopped, that the suffocation and upward forcing of some lower part affects the head and inward sense with dotage and idle fancies.

Pointless repression, he concluded, was an impediment to the work of true reformation.[42]

Looking backward through time, we can see, however hazily, what these reflections meant to Milton. His personal tragedy, his painful discovery of his own weakness and poor judgement, had led to and, in a sense, had been absolved by intellectual and spiritual discoveries of vast human importance. If he had been inclined to blame and depress himself for weakness, he could now, with perfect justification and proper humility, proclaim the universal weakness of generations of men, who had erred in judgement and occasioned their own misery. Patience in suffering became, then, a virtue as unnecessary as it was, to Milton, uncongenial. His self-inflicted suffering had been the means of giving a new freedom to all mankind. The way to the recovery of old and forgotten truth had been through 'this hazardous and accidental door of marriage'.[43]

In July of 1643, while the Westminster Assembly was holding its first meetings, Milton was hard at work on a pamphlet to be entitled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: restored to the good of both sexes, from the bondage of Canon Law, and other mistakes, to Christian freedom, guided by the Rule of Charity. Wherein also many pieces of Scripture have recovered their long-lost meaning. Seasonable to be now thought on in the Reformation intended.*[44] The words to notice particularly in this title are 'restored to the good of both sexes'; such was Milton's considered intention, although his text contains, perhaps inevitably, a masculine bias. On the other hand, it is nowhere directly and obviously personal. He is studiously impersonal to the extent of carefully avoiding any mention of political differences and modern instances; he does not argue for divorce on grounds of *desertion*; and he everywhere assumes, in his discussions of marital unhappiness, that the husband and wife are *living together* because compelled to. (If Milton had been more concerned about getting a divorce from Mary, and less concerned with the principles involved, he would surely have urged that England follow the other reformed churches and simplify the process of obtaining a divorce on grounds of desertion. Instead, he never presses this point.)[45] Throughout the entire pamphlet he exalts, in fervent language, the glories of true love and successful marriage; he is indestructible in his idealism. Throughout the entire pamphlet, but particularly in the first part, he appeals to human nature and simple reason as aids to the interpretation of the ambiguities of Scripture. And the key to the whole problem, as he presents it, is charity.

It took almost fanatical courage to write and publish *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. It took the kind of courage that comes with overwhelming conviction in the face of accepted opinion, the kind of courage that will stand alone if it can stand on solid truth. *The Doctrine and Discipline* is a more enthusiastic book than any of the tracts against Episcopacy, for its ardour is more than the ardour of belief; it glows with discovery, burns like a crusade. In writing it, Milton regarded himself, with excited pride, as a benefactor of the human race. He had found the thread that winds out of the labyrinth of man's unhappiness and leads to a new and reasonable liberty. He was contributing his knowledge to the general labour of reformation. It was such a vital gift that, in evangelical innocence, he hoped that readers would welcome it with appropriate joy.

History's gift of perspective carries no warrant for cynical amusement. If we know, now, that Milton was not the pioneer he considered himself, we know more than most of his contemporaries knew. Let us simply observe, for our own understanding of his intellectual development, that in writing *The Doctrine and Discipline* he was making a fresh and independent contribution to a debate which, in historical fact, had been in almost continuous progress since the dawn of the Reformation. His ignorance of the debate not only tells us something about his reading but also suggests that his interest in the problem of divorce had been slight before 1643.[46] On the other hand, the consistency of his opinions with those of others who had written on the subject tells us something about Milton's essentially Protestant temper. When he had almost finished composing the pamphlet, he chanced to read the notes of Grotius on the fifth chapter of Matthew, and found 'something he whispered rather than disputed about the law of charity and the true end of wedlock'.[47] He was pleased, and also surprised, by this discovery, and he added the opinions of Grotius. After his tract was in print, he made more such discoveries, which we shall consider in their proper place. It is curious that he never encountered *A Treatise of Marriage* by Daniel Rogers, which had been published late in 1640, and which contains views not inconsistent with his own.[48] When Milton approached the problem, he assumed that no man had been there before him, and he set down every period of his pamphlet with severe industry and much examination of himself.[49]

*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was published on or before 1 August 1643. Like four out of five of Milton's tracts against the prelates, it appeared anonymously; and like all of the earlier tracts, it was neither licensed nor registered. Unlike all of them, it has a carefully elaborate title and a motto, a quotation from Matthew xiii. 52: 'Every scribe instructed to the kingdom of Heaven is like the master of a house which bringeth out of his treasury things old and new.'

The pamphlet begins with the declaration that men, particularly the text-rigid adherents of the Canon Law, have been so perverse in folly that they have misinterpreted Christ's words on the law of divorce given by Moses, despite the rule of charity, and despite the fact that the law of Moses is 'charactered in us by nature'. The early Christian imperial laws (apparently approved in this respect by the learned Grotius) were framed with more equity than those of modern England. In advocating a return, then, to ancient liberty, Milton is not advocating licence; but he expects opposition from literal-minded slaves of custom and from persons with low ideals of marriage—persons who do not realize that 'a fit and matchable conversation' is no less essential than 'the gift of bodily conjunction'. He asks that his 'deliberate reason' be heard out to the end, and not be answered 'with sudden heat and noise'. Truth, he reminds his reader, has previously been born of 'singular and private thoughts' and deserves to 'be not ungently received' (380–7).[50]

His thesis, to be proved 'from Scripture or light of reason', is as follows: 'That indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangeable, hindering and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugal society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce than natural frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutual consent' (388). He then discusses the meaning of the law of Moses and the chief purpose of matrimony: 'a meet and happy conversation' (391). No covenant, he argues, not even the covenant of marriage, can bind against its own chief purpose or the aims of the persons covenanting. Common sense joins with charity to part 'those whom nothing holds together'. And human reason proclaims that satisfaction of the mind must be a higher end of marriage, more worthy the nobility of man, than satisfaction of the body. The Canon Law, therefore, is ignorant and iniquitous in providing for the rights of the body while failing to provide for the wrongs of the mind. Its carnal concern has made many marriages ignominious and, by thus dishonouring man's soul, has weakened Christian doctrine (387–93).

To the objection that a man should learn his wife's disposition before he marries her, Milton replies:

> who knows not that the bashful muteness of a virgin may ofttimes hide all the

> unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation? . . . nor is it therefore that for a modest error a man should forfeit so great a happiness—and no charitable means to release him. Since they who have lived most loosely by reason of their bold accustoming prove most successful in their matches (because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience), whenas the sober man, honouring the appearance of modesty and hoping well of every social virtue under that veil, may easily chance to meet, if not with a body impenetrable, yet often with a mind to all other due conversation inaccessible, and to all the more estimable and superior purposes of matrimony useless and almost lifeless. And what a solace, what a fit help such a consort would be through the whole life of a man, is less pain to conjecture than to have experience. [394–5]

True marriage was intended as a remedy, not of burning lust, but of burning loneliness, which is a rational burning, an intelligible flame. One frustrated of this remedy, although legally wed, is in effect forbidden to marry. Divorce, therefore, does not stain, but highly honours, the ideal of marriage; it recognizes that the dignity and prime blessing of matrimony lie in spiritual companionship, which is often not achieved. Yet the desire for such companionship is not quenched by an unfortunate marriage; hence, if divorce is impossible, the person deprived is in greater temptation than before. Finding himself 'bound fast to an uncomplying discord of nature', 'an image of earth and phlegm', he may relapse into melancholy despair (394–400).

An unfit marriage is a hindrance to the Christian life. The husband who 'continues to grieve whom he would not, and is no less grieved' (403), suffers a disturbance of mind which keeps him from worshipping God. His faith in God's providence once shaken, he may even sink from 'despair to thoughts of atheism' (405–6). The Canon Law permits divorce if either party is found contriving against the other's life; but grief is a murderer too! To prohibit a divorce sought for natural causes is against human nature, for next to matching with an infidel, what fouler incongruity in Christian society than 'two incoherent and uncombining dispositions' (417) bound by a tyrannical law? If marriage is a human covenant, its union must proceed from the 'due company' of the mind; if more than a human covenant, its union must be of the soul (403–23).

Following these arguments, 'the course of method brings on the unfolding of many Scriptures' (396). Milton examines, and attempts to reconcile, those passages which seem to revoke the law of Moses. I have already noted the nature of his reasoning. He now discusses the problem of understanding Scripture—the necessity for considering the context or occasion, and for comparing other texts; the dangers of literal interpretation; the Biblical use of hyperbole; Christ's mannerisms of speech. He also argues that the law given by Moses could not have authorized a sin, that the Gospel did not command a new morality, and that a law (or dispensation) should remain so long as its cause remains. Can anyone show, either in the nature of the Gospel or in the nature of mankind, that human weakness has disappeared? It was commanded in Eden: 'Therefore shall a man cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh'; but, says Milton, 'every command given with a reason binds our obedience no otherwise than that reason holds' (457). In this instance the reason, obviously, was that God intended man to have 'a meet help' (429–58).

Various objections are next dealt with: the argument of those who interpret the law of Moses as only the premisses of a succeeding law (as though God's people 'should be let wallow in adulterous marriages almost two thousand years for want of a direct law'!); the argument of those who saw divorce as permitted but not approved (as though 'a positive grant' of sin had come grudgingly from God!); the argument that it was a mere judicial law (allowing sin!) and not a law of moral equity. Commenting on the original institution of marriage, Milton again insists on the need for spiritual compatibility; otherwise, 'instead of being one flesh, they will be rather two carcasses chained unnaturally together' (478). Commenting upon Christ's utterance, he discusses the occasion and explains why the words must be interpreted as a reproof to the Pharisees, not a command to posterity. He ends, as he began, with an appeal to the rule of charity (463 to the end).

Milton admits that liberty of divorce would be abused in England, as it was abused by the ancient Jews. But good laws are made for good men, and 'honest liberty is the greatest foe to dishonest licence.' He makes it quite clear that, in his opinion, divorce should not be permitted for malice, or for any 'accidental, temporary, or reconcilable offence'—not even for 'stubborn disobedience against the husband'.[51] It should be permitted only for genuine and certain incompatibility, amply demonstrated. The way in which it was apparently managed under the law of Moses seems to Milton perfectly reasonable: the conscience of the husband could decide whether or not his wife, or he, or the both of them, felt hopelessly mismated. It is too intimate and subtle a matter to be tried by the law, although the magistrate should see to it that the condition of the divorce is just and equal. Milton could imagine no other way of protecting the wife from embarrassment and indignity than to trust the husband to handle the business fairly:

> For even the freedom and eminence of man's creation gives him to be a law in this matter to himself, being the head of the other sex which was made for him, whom, therefore, though he ought not to injure, yet neither should he be forced to retain in society to his own overthrow, nor to hear any judge therein above himself. It being also an unseemly affront to the sequestered and veiled modesty of that sex to have her unpleasingness and other concealments bandied up and down and aggravated in open court by those hired masters of tongue-fence. . . . that woman whose honour is not appeached is less injured by a silent dismission,

> being otherwise not illiberally dealt with, than to endure a clamouring debate of utterless things in a business of that civil secrecy and difficult discerning as not to be over-much questioned [even] by nearest friends. [501–2]

Milton made this one concession to control over the husband as judge of divorce—that he should first state his case in the presence of his minister and some elders of the church, protesting his decision 'in the faith of the eternal Gospel and the hope he has of happy resurrection' (508).

The entire first edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, a printing of perhaps twelve hundred or more copies, was exhausted within five or six months. Since nothing of this sort had happened to the earlier pamphlets (unless it happened to the *Animadversions* against Hall), Milton must have been surprised. He was far from pleased, however, when he learned what people were saying. Although 'divers learned and judicious men testified their daily approbation of the book', by most of his readers he was 'esteemed the deviser of a new and pernicious paradox', 'a novelty of licence' and of 'libertinism'.[52] His central thesis was one easily distorted, and to the casual reader, even to his recent confederates the Presbyterians, he seemed to be advocating 'divorce at pleasure'. To heresy-hunters of all sorts he became fair game. His views were labelled 'licentious, new, and dangerous'; his book was called 'lewd'; its anonymous author was 'lavishly traduced'. Milton discovered that he had put off into a 'wild and calumnious world', 'a world of disesteem'. The 'odious inferences' of the vulgar public he had half expected, but he was totally unprepared for the attitude taken by some of the clergy. Was he not 'one who heretofore hath done good service to the Church by their own confession'? Had he not earlier 'spoke honestest things to the nation'?[53] Was it proper that he should now be greeted with a clamour of so much envy and impertinence?

The maddening thing about the reception of his book was the failure of anyone to offer a serious criticism or undertake a reply. The book was widely bought, but most readers seemed to have stopped with the title or the first few pages. They gossiped about it; they did not discuss its argument. The common man, whom Milton had defended in his tracts against the prelates, could be irritatingly shallow and stupid:

> he who shall endeavour the amendment of any old neglected grievance in Church or State, . . . let me areed him not to be the foreman of any misjudged opinion, unless his resolutions be firmly seated in a square and constant mind, not conscious to itself of any deserved blame, and regardless of ungrounded suspicions. For this let him be sure: he shall be boarded presently by the ruder sort (but not by discreet and well-nurtured men) with a thousand idle descants and surmises—who, when they cannot confute the least joint or sinew of any passage in the book, yet God forbid that truth should be truth, because they have a boisterous conceit of some pretences in the writer. [369]

It was awkward and uncomfortable for Milton to find himself 'traduced to be the agent of his own by-ends under pretext of Reformation' (370), particularly since he had made such an effort to be impersonal. He had omitted his name from the first edition, as 'not willing it should sway the reader either for me or against me'; but anonymity had proved an unexpected disadvantage. Therefore, he said later, 'when I was told that the style (which what it ails to be so soon distinguishable I cannot tell) was known by most men, and that some of the clergy began to inveigh and exclaim on what I was credibly informed they had not read, I took it then for my proper season both to show them a name that could easily contemn such an indiscreet kind of censure, and to reinforce the question with a more accurate diligence—that if any of them would be so good as to leave railing, and to let us hear so much of his learning and Christian wisdom as will be strictly demanded of him in his answering to this problem, care was had he should not spend his preparations against a nameless pamphlet.'[54] Milton continued his crusade with a revised edition, his name defiantly attached.

The second edition was published on or before 2 February 1644, with a more detailed title than before, and with a second motto (from Proverbs xviii. 13): 'He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.'[55] If less spirited than its predecessor, this book is longer and more impressive in appearance. It is divided into two parts, each of which is subdivided into chapters, with carefully worded headings for the benefit of the too-casual reader. The whole case is boldly placed before Parliament (and the Westminster Assembly) in a stirring introductory letter of six pages: 'The duty and the right of an instructed Christian calls me, through the chance of good or evil report, to be the sole advocate of a discountenanced truth—a high enterprise, Lords and Commons, a high enterprise and a hard' (369). In view of the tract's recent reception, its author appeals to the wisdom and piety of Parliament for a hearing. They will be sympathetic, for they too, in their noble work of reformation, have been attacked by the fretful will of infamy. Does the question of divorce concern them? Human concern with truth has a strange history: 'When points of difficulty are to be discussed appertaining to the removal of unreasonable wrong and burden from the perplexed life of our brother, it is incredible how cold, how dull, how far from all fellow-feeling we are, without the spur of self-concernment' (371). Milton had learned the irony of this from his own experience. But Parliament, appointed by God to reform a great nation, would realize that the problem of marriage was fundamental in their labours; indeed, 'farewell all hope of true reformation in the state while such an evil as this lies undiscerned or unregarded in the house' (375). Parliament the matter concerned chiefly; 'me it concerns next, having with much labour and faithful diligence first found out, or at least with a fearless and communicative candour first published to the manifest good of Christendom' (371-2). Let Parliament free the dignity of man, and Milton promised them a new title: 'the

Defenders of Charity' (377). Their reformation of divorce laws would soon spread to Scotland and the Norman Isles—perhaps to other parts of Europe. England has ancient precedent for teaching other nations how to live.

Milton's continued faith in Parliament is a crutch, now, for his badly injured optimism; and he uses it jauntily. To England's legislators, currently at war with their king, he offers a pointed analogy between marriage and political allegiance:

> Advise ye well, supreme senate, if charity be thus excluded and expulsed, how ye will defend the untainted honour of your own actions and proceedings. He who marries intends as little to conspire his own ruin as he that swears allegiance; and as a whole people is in proportion to an ill government, so is one man to an ill marriage. . . . to resist the highest magistrate, though tyrannizing, God never gave us express allowance, only He gave us reason, charity, nature, and good example to bear us out; but in this economical misfortune thus to demean ourselves, besides the warrant of those four great directors, which doth as justly belong hither, we have an express law of God . . . [374–5]

Unsound people, 'of a waterish and queasy conscience', have cried shame, have called freedom 'injury and licence', and they will continue to show such 'qualming zeal' (370–1). But Parliament knows well that, of all teachers, Custom has the most disciples, who silently follow her glib and easy method. Parliament knows that her pretended learning and counterfeit knowledge impede education and speak from pulpit and bar, 'depressing the high and heaven-born spirit of man'. 'Error supports Custom, Custom countenances error'; together they suppress all truth and solid wisdom, 'cry down the industry of free reasoning under the terms of humour and innovation, as if the womb of teeming Truth were to be closed up' (368). Custom conspires always against the testimony of man's free soul. Thanking Parliament for his peace and leisure, Milton asks the continued privilege of free speech. 'I seek not to seduce the simple and illiterate; my errand is to find out the choicest and the learnedest' (378). His book on divorce, he now sees, 'might perhaps more fitly have been written in another tongue, and I had done so but that the esteem I have of my country's judgement, and the love I bear to my native language to serve it first with what I endeavour, made me speak it thus, ere I assay the verdict of outlandish readers' (378–9).[56] Even if Parliament fails to justify this esteem, 'for me, as far as my part leads me, I have already my greatest gain—assurance and inward satisfaction to have done in this nothing unworthy of an honest life and studies well employed—with what event among the wise and right understanding handful of men, I am secure' (377). He is proud to have fathered truth, even though she come into the world like a bastard, to the ignominy of her parent.

Milton's revisions in the second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline* were in part stylistic, but chiefly an elaboration of the argument, especially the exegesis of Scripture with which the tract concludes. Some of the chapters of the second section or 'book' are completely new. During the months since the first edition appeared, Milton had been reading widely. He had found some support for his thesis in the learned opinion of Paulus Fagius; he had seen the relevance of Selden's *De Jure naturali et gentium* to his developing view of Christian liberty; he had acquired familiarity with a number of judgements by theologians which seemed to count for or against his own judgement. In added passages, therefore, he introduces this new material, and ventures to debate the opinions of Arminius, Rivetus, Paraeus, and others.

One of the most interesting additions (a startling reminder of Milton's unorthodox manner as a pamphleteer) is a pretty Platonic myth about Love seeking his brother Anteros, and being deceived by 'many false and feigning Desires that wander singly up and down in his likeness' (401). As a matter of fact, Milton is a little nervous about interjecting allegory into controversy, and he does not want the reader to misunderstand:

> by the leave of those who would be counted the only grave ones, this is no mere amatorious novel (though to be wise and skilful in these matters, men heretofore of greatest name in virtue have esteemed it one of the highest arcs that human contemplation, circling upward, can make from the glassy sea whereon she stands), but this is a deep and serious verity, showing us that love in marriage cannot live nor subsist unless it be mutual, and where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing but the empty husk of an outside matrimony, as undelightful and unpleasing to God as any other kind of hypocrisy. [401–2]

God calls us to peace, not to bondage; yet the Canon Law condemns man 'to grind in the mill of an undelighted and servile copulation' (403). The revision of the second edition afforded Milton an opportunity to expand in indignation against laws which degraded the spirit of man: 'What thing ever was more made for man alone and less for God than marriage? . . . Let who so will now listen: I want neither pall nor mitre, I stay neither for ordination nor induction, but in the firm faith of a knowing Christian, which is the best and truest endowment of the keys, I pronounce: the man who shall bind so cruelly a good and gracious ordinance of God hath not in that *the spirit of Christ*' (429).

There was also space in which to discuss free will and predestination, sin and punishment, with reference to both classical thought and Christian theology. God 'binds Himself like a just lawgiver to His own prescriptions', and we should make God the author of sin if we assumed that He gave different laws on divorce at different times (440). As for the opinion of Beza and Paraeus, that divorce was once allowed for afflicted wives only, this is a merciful reason, of course; yet 'a husband may be injured as insufferably in marriage as a wife': 'What an injury is it after wedlock not to be beloved, what to be slighted, what to be contended with in point of house-rule who shall be the head, not for any parity of wisdom (for that were something reasonable), but out of a female pride. . . . is it not most likely that God in His law had more pity towards man thus wedlocked than towards the woman that was created for another?' (475). The Canon Law lacks all charity and human understanding in putting casual adultery above natural hatred as a reason for divorce. Adultery is a transient injury, soon amended; it need not involve hatred or hinder future loyalty and helpfulness, if it be pardoned. 'Natural hatred, whenever it arises, is a greater evil in marriage than the accident of adultery, a greater defrauding', because a spiritual defrauding (483–4).[57] Only men who know the meaning of 'true concord' will understand this distinction, but Milton elaborates it in the second edition, with lofty words on the nature of love and marriage.

While he was writing thus to educate the public, he was making good progress in his education of John and Edward Phillips at home. Indeed, after it was evident that Mary would not return (and perhaps by April 1643), he had accepted a few additional pupils, probably the children of friends.[58] We are not certain of the names of these pupils, but one of them would seem to have been Cyriack Skinner, aged sixteen in November 1643, and later one of Milton's most loyal disciples and friends. Cyriack was a grandson of the famous jurist, Sir Edward Coke, and the youngest son of Mrs. Bridget Skinner, a widow since 1627.[59] He was almost three years older than Edward Phillips.

In later life Phillips acknowledged gratefully the unusual education he had received at his uncle's hands. Many of the books read were by authors scarcely heard of in the 'common public schools', and Milton's method of teaching them, his pleasantly familiar conversation with his pupils, savoured not in the least of pedantry. He never, of course, pretended to conduct anything like a school, to teach all the young fry of a parish, 'but only was willing to impart his learning and knowledge to relations and the sons of some gentlemen that were his intimate friends'. The students—or Phillips at least—realized that they were participating in scholarly and literary designs apart from their own education. For one thing, the books studied gave the ever-industrious Milton 'the reading of all these authors as it were by proxy'.[60]

Once more, thanks to the notes in his accidentally preserved Commonplace Book, we know a good deal about Milton's private reading in this period—reading not done, that is, for practical or controversial purposes, but reflecting instead his original, clearly conceived plans for self-education. Whether or not he ever scheduled it so precisely, the fact is that *for a full decade* beginning in 1635 he persisted in familiarizing himself with the medieval and modern history of Europe. The intense concentration on British history in the years 1639–41 was doubtless motivated in part by his hope of beginning an epic which would use these materials; but, that hope frustrated, and his curiosity about his own country at least temporarily satisfied, the recent traveller returned in late 1641 or early 1642 to his broader programme and, even while writing seven tracts on divorce and other subjects, even while accepting additional pupils to teach, somehow found the time to study the histories of Cuspinian, Sleidan, Sarpi, Thuanus, Girard, Commines, and a number of other writers. The proof survives in a great many notes, notes that reveal to us a wide-ranging scholarly mind, serenely oblivious to the petty or urgent problems that must have occupied other hours of his busy day.[61]

Except for a very few later notes in his own handwriting, and not many more in the hands of amanuenses, the Commonplace Book seems to have served its purpose by 1645. It is appropriate, therefore, that we pause at this point to recognize its significance in Milton's life-story, the more so because its revelations were totally unknown to his biographers before 1921, when James Holly Hanford analysed and summarized them for us. I can do no better now than to paraphrase Hanford's findings.[62] To begin with some negatives, it is clear that Milton's programme of independent study was *not* research for immediate use, or for any specific purposes; it was not a search for poetic subjects or materials; it was not preparation for a career as an historian. The object was self-cultivation, the general enrichment and maturing of the mind through liberal study and meditation. That histories constituted the ideal substance of such education was not, of course, Milton's belief; there was no such emphasis in his own teaching, or in the ideal curriculum he was soon to outline. He turned to history because he felt it to be the greatest gap in his own intellectual experience, and because he felt sure that it would provide him with the basis for correct thinking on the large issues, civil and religious, of his age.

Milton also believed that the writing of great poetry required breadth and depth of reading. This is no coincidence; but it would be a mistake to consider it his sole or even his chief motive in studying history for a decade so full of distractions. He was preparing himself intellectually for whatever opportunities for service the future might bring, public or private, political or religious, poetic or prosaic. Moreover, he was behaving like a true humanist. The varied but coherent list of books read tells us one thing; the notes taken tell another, and something perhaps more important. Few entries were set down in the spirit of a controversialist; many were set down in the spirit of a liberal thinker. They clearly reveal the widening scope of his interests; they occasionally show his alertness to issues of the day; but for the most part they exhibit both the richness and the essential oneness of his culture as a man of the Renaissance. As Hanford observed, all save one of the great Renaissance subjects for speculation are reflected in Milton's notes: there is nothing about the art of love.

The special *additional* reading that Milton had to do before writing the five anti-episcopal tracts, and his pamphlets on marriage and divorce, must have filled other notebooks; it left little trace in the Commonplace Book. Those other notebooks are lost, but we need not regret their absence; from the allusions in his numerous tracts it is easy, now, to reconstruct his practical reading programme, and they tell us little about his intellectual development. They tell us nothing at all about the Milton that the Commonplace Book notes reveal to us, the stubbornly persistent student, intellectually curious, philosophically detached, capable of jotting down an amused note on African poets, or European universities, or the birth of the musical scale—before putting the book back on the shelf and turning to problems of the moment.

Those problems of the moment included the writing of many angry paragraphs, and daily, of course, included attention to the young charges under his roof. The writing and teaching we have long known about, and they have dominated our mental picture of Milton in this period. The Commonplace Book gives us a broader perspective, and, happily reminded of Milton the humanist, we realize that the gaudy-days spent with young friends of Gray's Inn, the pleasant evenings spent with the Hobsons, are not single, isolated events in his biography, but fortunately preserved shreds of a pattern of social life that may have been very rich and rewarding. Edward Phillips also tells us that his uncle 'often visited' a relative, William Blackborough, who lived nearby in the lane of St. Martin-le-Grand.[63] Blackborough will have his particular moment in the next chapter of our story, but, like some others whom I shall have occasion to mention later, as we come to incidents that can be dated, he must have been a meaningful part of Milton's life for a number of years. Impossible as it may be to say exactly when a given relationship began, as we think of the poet in the 1640's we should not forget that he found time to make a good many new friends and acquaintances—not only printers and booksellers (and their wives too, if his known friendship with the Thomasons was typical), but also an attractive (and mysterious) Miss Davis, Lady Margaret Hobson and her husband, Mrs. Bridget Skinner, Lady Barrymore, Lady Ranelagh, John Bradshaw, John Dury, Charles Fleetwood, Theodore Haak, John Hall, Samuel Hartlib, Francis Junius, Robert Overton, John Sadleir, and Patrick Young.[64] Of these names we are certain, and, though there must have been many more (one is tempted to add General Fairfax and Dr. Nathan Paget), they are enough to remind us that the Milton who had so greatly enjoyed the Italian academies did not become a recluse upon his return to England. It is reasonable to assume, without documentary proof, that he also kept in touch with various friends of his youth, not only fellow students like Robert Pory and Henry Myriell, but also John Diodati, Alexander Gill,[65] Henry Lawes, John Lane, and Thomas Young.

Let us observe, then, that the deserted husband of Mary Powell did not mope in self-inflicted solitude. Books were a comfort or welcome distraction (awaiting her return in September 1642, he had reread Sir John Harington's translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*),[66] but good friends were a comfort too, and we may be sure that he found some who were not shocked by his views on divorce, some who were genuinely appreciative of both his ideas and his style. He is not imagining when he refers in print to this sympathetic audience. It was very real, despite our inability, now, to name names. Our ignorance constitutes no evidence that we are concerned with a lone radical.

Radical, however, he was, not only in his opinions on marriage and divorce, but equally so in his attitudes toward education. We have traced the extraordinary curriculum followed by the Phillips boys during their first three years under their uncle's tutelage. We observed them quickly acquiring a good working knowledge of both Latin and Greek, then promptly using these languages to learn the fundamentals of agriculture, mathematics, a number of the sciences, architecture, and military strategy. The range of their reading was considerable. In their fourth year (1643), while continuing some of their previous studies, they seem to have added applied medicine or hygiene, Milton 'in course' reading to them 'out of some not tedious writer' the elements of medicine, so that they would be sufficiently informed on basic matters of health to benefit themselves, their friends, and, perhaps some day (who could tell?), a whole army.[67] At this stage, also, two ingenious pedagogical devices were introduced. The young Phillipses used their two foreign languages to read a good deal of poetry —poetry carefully chosen, however, because it dealt with things they had already learned.[68] As a corollary to this literary experience, their teacher thought that they should take field trips and talk with actual practitioners of the divers subjects they had studied, and listen to such experts when some of them visited the classroom. Thus, what had perforce seemed largely theoretical would be translated, simultaneously, into the practical *and* the aesthetic. (Since travel beyond London was hazardous in 1643 and 1644, this phase of Milton's scheme probably had limited application.)

In about the fifth year (1644) of his curriculum, Milton deemed his pupils ready to acquire a third foreign language, provided that it was one closely related to a language already mastered. Not surprisingly, he chose Italian, and, again, he made his nephews put it immediately to use, this time by reading a well-known history of its speakers.[69] It was probably in this same year that he introduced his pupils to ethical and moral problems—chiefly through the reading of foreign classics in the original, but with the lessons of Christianity supplied, as needed, for antidote or balance. With the principles of virtuous behaviour clearly grasped, the students could then begin the study of household management and family life (as their teacher penned additional pamphlets on the subject of marriage and divorce). Great dramas dealing with these matters, either comedy or tragedy, could also now be read and enjoyed—in any of three foreign languages (there is no evidence that Milton considered any English drama suitable to this educational objective).[70]

We cannot speak positively about how much of this unusual curriculum had been completed by the middle of the year 1644, but we have evidence that Milton's views on education were by then remarkably clear and revolutionary. His experience had confirmed his belief that children of normal intelligence could absorb more during the first few years than formal education ever demanded of them, especially if time was not wasted on language study for its own sake and if books were carefully chosen for style and the attraction of their subject-matter. In his opinion the first principle of effective pedagogy was a beginning with matters easy and most obvious to the sense, then a gradual progression from concrete to abstract concerns. A complete and generous education was one 'which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and public of peace and war', and this large objective could be attained, he thought, 'between twelve and one-and-twenty, less time than is now bestowed in pure trifling at grammar and sophistry'.[71]

Milton believed that the schools and universities of his day failed utterly in one of their prime functions, to instil a *love of learning* in youth. It was part of his theory (and, we may be sure, his practice also) to give pupils 'such lectures and explanations upon every opportunity as may lead and draw them in willing obedience, inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue, stirred up with high hopes of living to be brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God and famous to all ages, that they may despise and scorn all their childish and ill-taught qualities, to delight in manly and liberal exercises' (282). Persuasion, occasional threats, and, most effective of all, personal example, can produce diligence in studies, he declared. The good teacher should be quickly sympathetic in his recognition of natural inclinations; for example, 'in those vernal seasons of the year, when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against Nature not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing with heaven and earth' (290). He did not believe in boys studying so hard in the springtime as in other seasons, if 'after two or three years that they have well laid their grounds'. Regardless of the season, he believed in about one hour and a half of exercise each day, preferably before dinner at noon. It is likely that he taught fencing to his young charges when they were old enough to handle their weapons. He himself carried a sword whenever he walked abroad, and he was skilled in using it.[72] He thought that all young men should know 'the exact use of their weapon, to guard and to strike safely with edge or point; this will keep them healthy, nimble, strong, and well in breath, is also the likeliest means to make them grow large and tall, and to inspire them with a gallant and fearless courage' (288). Like everything else in education, exercise should be as practical as possible.

Study of certain subjects should be postponed, Milton was persuaded until the student has acquired both sufficient maturity and sufficient background of knowledge. Ethics was one such subject. And after ethics, in thoughtfully ascending order, the student might be introduced to economics, then political science, then the principles of law, then theology and Church history, then great poetry, then logic,[73] and finally, as the crown of a liberal curriculum, rhetoric and poetics. At the end of formal education, not at its beginning, 'will be the right season of forming them to be able writers and composers in every excellent matter, when they shall be thus fraught with an universal insight into things' (284–6). This was the considered view of a man of thirty-five who had himself composed poetry, publishable poetry, at fifteen.

One of Milton's friends in this period was a person to whom such unorthodox ideas of education were as heady as bock beer. This was Samuel Hartlib, the Prussian-born son of a Polish father and an English mother, an unprosperous merchant by vocation and an energetic, public-spirited social reformer by avocation. Hartlib was a one-man news service; he carried on an extensive correspondence in England and abroad, and he seemed to know everybody. With his passion for being well informed and his philanthropic inclinations, he was drawn irresistibly to new ideas and was probably one of the 'divers learned and judicious men' who testified their approval of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. If, as seems likely, he made Milton's acquaintance after the publication of this pamphlet, he was subsequently delighted to learn that Milton also had notions about the reform of education. In his notebook for 1643 he made this memorandum: 'Mr. Milton in Aldersgate Street has written many good books—a great traveller and full of projects and inventions.'[74] Hartlib was the chief disciple in England of the famous Moravian educator, John Amos Comenius, whose theories about the rapid teaching of languages and the desirability of universal education Hartlib had introduced to the English public through three pamphlets, in 1637, 1639, and 1642. Comenius had visited England recently, in the winter of 1641–2, and his friends had tried loyally but vainly to make Parliament listen to his views on educational reform. Hartlib was still hopeful that some great change might be effected, and Milton's ideas, although they differed from those of Comenius in several basic ways, interested him greatly.[75]

They talked 'at several times', and Hartlib expressed both pleasure and satisfaction in hearing the Englishman's theories. He was so well pleased, in fact, that he earnestly entreated Milton to make his ideas available in print. Milton hesitated. He admired Hartlib and of course was impressed by the enthusiastic request; he was also thoroughly convinced of the importance of 'the reforming of education' in England, 'one of the greatest and noblest designs that can be thought on, and for the want whereof this nation perishes'. The moment, too, was propitious: there was 'so much opportunity to try what God hath determined.' On the other hand, Milton was still busy with 'other assertions, the knowledge and the use of which cannot but be a great furtherance both to the enlargement of truth and honest living, with much more peace.' He had not abandoned his singular assault on the divorce laws; almost three months after the appearance of the revised edition of his tract he had been greatly encouraged to continue. Someone (perhaps Hartlib) had called his attention to the fact that Martin Bucer, one of the most respected leaders of the Reformation in England, had expressed views on divorce which were strikingly similar to his own. This unexpected support was providential, and Milton was working, at the very time Hartlib made his plea, on a translation into English of all the relevant passages in Bucer's book, intending to publish them as soon as possible.[76]

Nevertheless, Hartlib's enthusiasm was most persuasive, and, as Milton put it, 'prevailed with me to divide thus, or transpose, my former thoughts' (275). Perhaps what really happened was that Hartlib's request caused Milton to see, for the first time, that his writing could develop a major design: he had already published on various aspects of religious liberty and on a single phase of domestic liberty; the education of children was clearly another important question in the domestic category, and a tract on the subject would emphasize his broader concern. (Ten years later he was to pronounce this pattern-making deliberate.) In any case, he put aside the translation and started composing a brief statement, in the form of a letter to his friend, which would give 'a general view' of his theories, enough 'for light and direction' (291). He limited 'these few observations' to his concept of how 'our noble and our gentle youth', between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, might receive 'a better education, in extent and comprehension far more large, and yet of time far shorter, and of attainment far more certain, than hath been yet in practice' (276). He made it clear that he was not discussing either professional training (there should be separate colleges of law and medicine) or primary education ('which yet might be worth many considerations'). He ignored the problem of education for women and the argument for universal education advanced by Comenius, dismissing Hartlib's master with the blunt confession: 'to search what many modern Januas and Didactics (more than ever I shall read) have projected, my inclination leads me not' (276). Milton's views, although they had benefited from 'old renowned authors' (and from the happier aspects of his study at St. Paul's School), were still his own. His scheme, he said, was 'likest to those ancient and famous schools of Pythagoras, Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, and such others, out of which were bred up such a number of renowned philosophers, orators, historians, poets, and princes all over Greece, Italy, and Asia, besides the flourishing studies of Cyrene and Alexandria. But herein it shall exceed them and supply a defect as great as that which Plato noted in the commonwealth of Sparta: whereas that city trained up their youth most for war, and these in their academies and lycaeum all for the gown, this institution of breeding which I here delineate shall be equally good both for peace and war' (287-8).

Milton's plan of education was designed to produce, not ordinary citizens, but leaders in public life. And it involved nothing less than the total abolition of universities. The Miltonic academy would supply every need between the introduction to Latin grammar and the master's degree which it proposed to make obsolete.

Education for leadership, in Milton's view, must effect an early discovery of aptitudes and talents. Students must encounter a wide variety of subjects, and a pedagogical method must be used which would 'try all their peculiar gifts of nature and, if there were any secret excellence among them, would fetch it out and give it fair opportunities to advance itself by, which could not but mightily redound to the good of this nation' (290). The best such method would be a combination of theory and practice, of study and practical experience. Specifically, students should be led to profit directly from 'the helpful experiences of hunters, fowlers, fishermen, shepherds, gardeners, apothecaries, and, in the other sciences, architects, engineers, mariners, anatomists, who doubtless would be ready, some for reward, and some to favour such a hopeful seminary. And this will give them such a real tincture of natural knowledge as they shall never forget, but daily augment with delight' (284). In the spring, the older students should, moreover, 'ride out in companies with prudent and staid guides to all the quarters of the land, learning and observing all places of strength, all commodities of building and of soil, for towns and tillage, harbours and ports for trade, sometimes taking sea as far as to our navy, to learn there also what they can in the practical knowledge of sailing and of sea-fight.' Education for leadership could be, and should be, made attractive to students. The quality of instruction, therefore, was no less vital than the curriculum; Milton warned that his plan was emphatically 'not a bow for every man to shoot in that counts himself a teacher' (291). However, given a faculty able to inspire a true love of learning, devoted to the development of character along with intelligence, the plan would prove, in the words of its advocate, 'not more difficult than I imagine, and that imagination presents me with nothing but very happy and very possible'. One further warning: the study would be 'laborious indeed at the first ascent' (280); later it would be easy.

*Of Education: to Master Samuel Hartlib* was formally registered on 4 June 1644 by Thomas Underhill, the bookseller who had published the first three of Milton's pamphlets against Episcopacy. It was the first thing from Milton's pen to be officially licensed (by James Cranford) and entered at Stationers' Hall. When it was ready in print—on this same day or the next—it appeared as a single sheet folded in quarto, eight pages without title page, publisher's name, date, or indication of authorship.[77]

Almost certainly it was privately printed and intended for a limited circulation, like the earlier *Epitaphium Damonis.* Milton doubtless bore the expense, and Underhill made the necessary arrangements.

The letter *Of Education* envisages decentralization in the training of leaders. In every city of the nation there should be one or more academies, each with house and grounds spacious enough to accommodate about 130 students. This number, in their military training, would constitute a company of infantry or, interchangeably, two troops of cavalry. They would all live and eat together (a plain, healthful, and moderate diet, of course); and apart from military drill, some fencing and wrestling would provide enough exercise for physical development. With England at war and events of the past five years demonstrating the need for better disciplined soldiery, Milton is much concerned about training capable officers. Each day, about two hours before supper, the students of his ideal academy would, 'in sport but with much exactness', drill, ride, and learn 'the rudiments of their soldiership in all the skill of embattling, marching, encamping, fortifying, besieging, and battering, with all the helps of ancient and modern stratagems, tactics, and warlike maxims' (288–9).

The academic curriculum sketched in the letter is very rich, and embodies the general principles which we have hitherto observed Milton following in his instruction of the Phillips boys. Edward's enthusiastic account of his education, which names a number of authors studied, shows us that the first four years or so of Milton's scheme were a direct product of recent experience in teaching and involved but few refinements of details. Milton had practised what he now preached. This fact lends special interest to the latter part of his curriculum—his plans, so to speak, for the unsuspecting guinea-pigs under his roof. Edward seems to have remained with him for a total of about six years (John, perhaps a little longer), and, again, the pupil's account lets us see that educational theory was skilfully turned into actuality. In six years he learned at least four foreign languages, and reached the point of studying theology under his uncle—even aiding in the compilation of a 'perfect system of divinity' (of which more later).[78]

Milton's announced plan for the sixth year (approximately) of his curriculum involved the learning of Hebrew and Aramaic, and—after a full year, let us recall, devoted to ethics and economics—the study of political science and citizenship, then law, and then theology and Church history. The order is highly significant. With this much background, Milton thought that his hypothetical leaders-in-training, now aged about eighteen (the Phillips boys were younger), would be ready for a year devoted entirely to the study of great literature in the original languages. They would read epics and histories, political orations and tragedies. They would read, of course, not only with linguistic facility, by now well developed, but also with intellectual awareness and emotional involvement. Clearly, in Milton's view, literary masterpieces demand adequate preparation and some maturity. He emphasizes also that some of them deserve to be memorized and recited.

There are about two more years in this carefully thought-out scheme of education; Milton, as we have observed, meant to build to a climax. In approximately the eighth year he would introduce them, *in this order*, to logic, to rhetoric, and to poetics or theory of literature. Renaissance education normally put both logic and rhetoric earlier in the curriculum, but Milton would save them, once more for a practical purpose, and he declares that he would teach no more of logic than is really 'useful'. The final year of this curriculum, then, would be devoted to but a single activity—composition. 'From hence and not till now', says Milton, the students will write. They will write because, at long last, they will have something to write about, some basis for expressing opinions, and they will also have critical judgement and taste. He was scornful of the educational practices of his age, which compelled youngsters to write when they obviously had nothing to say, and no discriminating acquaintance with styles worthy of imitation. It was, he says, 'a preposterous exaction, forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations, which are the acts of ripest judgement and the final work of a head filled by long reading, and observing . . . These are not matters to be wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the nose, or the plucking of untimely fruit' (278). His object, we must remember, was not to produce poets like himself, or professional writers, but rather to develop leaders who could express themselves with eloquence and logic and substance: 'Whether they be to speak in Parliament or council, honour and attention would be waiting on their lips. There would then also appear in pulpits other visages, other gestures, and stuff otherwise wrought than what we now sit under, oft times to as great a trial of our patience as any other that they preach to us' (286–7).

In sketching this 'methodical course' of study, Milton recognized the necessity for occasional review, 'until they have confirmed and solidly united the whole body of their perfected knowledge'. He also made provision for learning, as well as listening to, music, which, unless wise men were much mistaken, has 'a great power over dispositions and manners, to smoothe and make them gentle from rustic harshness and distempered passions.' The best time for music was during the rest periods before and after the noonday meal, when students would enjoy singing 'religious, martial, or civil ditties' (287–9).

This, then, is the Miltonic plan *Of Education*, submitted to Samuel Hartlib in 1644, almost a month before the battle of Marston Moor. Like a million other schemes and dreams, it was soon lost in the larger issues of revolution—to be republished by its resilient author, however, twenty-nine years later. Meanwhile, it doubtless stirred up a pedagogical tempest in the teapot of Hartlib's acquaintance,[79] and, within the next few years, it evidently inspired a few parents to entrust their gentle or noble progeny to Mr. Milton's extraordinary care.[80] Certainly Edward Phillips profited from the theories set forth in the letter, and his wry comment on his own education is still a fair criticism of the Miltonic curriculum and method: 'Now persons so far manuducted into the highest paths of literature both divine and human, had they received his documents with the same acuteness of wit and apprehension, the same industry, alacrity, and thirst after knowledge as the instructor was indued with, what prodigies of wit and learning might they have proved!'[81] The essence and first half of the plan were actually tried, and the human results have not greatly recommended it to posterity. However, as a statement of educational ideals, and as an index to Milton's mind, the letter remains one of the most interesting and provocative of all his many pamphlets.

In the view of some students, including the present writer, if we strip the curriculum of its obviously obsolete bibliography and leave open the question of which foreign languages are to be studied (keeping, however, the ultra-modern *method* of study and the rationale for choosing the languages), Milton's letter constitutes a continuing challenge to educational philosophy and practice in both his own country and the United States. Ignore its advocacy of such admirable pedagogical principles as motivation and reinforcement, attention to character development, discovery of individual aptitudes, periodical review, and progression from easy to hard; these, after three centuries and more, are hardly novel. What is still remarkable about Milton's curriculum is its high degree of integration and progression, its tight texture and firm efficiency. It is not a series of unrelated or loosely related subjects; it is a 'methodical course'. Everything contributes to something else; it *builds* toward a clearly defined goal, and nothing is irrelevant or peripheral to that goal. A basic premiss of his argument—that far too much time is wasted in education—has not been invalidated by the best efforts of posterity. Perhaps posterity, then, should take another look at his proposed solution.

This is not to suggest that public education can afford exclusive programmes for the training of leaders (drawn from only one sex), or that we should turn back the clock and try classical education on the teeming masses. Milton's ideas were basically rebellious and revolutionary; he asserts his independence, even of Comenius and other contemporary educational reformers. His curriculum would provide an early start and thorough training in mathematics; it would give great prominence to music, military training, modern foreign languages, and the various sciences. He eschews the use of especially prepared digests and compilations (a feature of the Comenian theory), preferring textbooks that either are classics or are written in styles worth imitation. He minimizes the study of grammar and, as we have seen, postpones all composition to the very end of the educational process. Moreover, it is clear that he wants a national educational system. These are all aspects of his theory that his contemporaries would have considered unique or most unusual, but they are details; they are not the essence of the plan. The essence is an efficient, closely integrated curriculum with a clear goal toward which everything quite clearly progresses. Naming their own goal with equal clarity, our modern educators might try emulating Milton's bold efficiency in curriculum-making, which begins, notice, by ignoring the conventional division of secondary and higher education and also conventional thinking about the number of years necessary for schooling.

Edward Phillips was obviously impressed and pleased by his uncle's selection of unconventional textbooks. It is not at all surprising to find such a teacher eventually writing his own textbooks. It is a pity, however, that we cannot say precisely when he did so; two that we know about were not published until much later in his life, and Phillips does not tell us when they were composed. Of the instructor Phillips says merely: 'Neither his converse, *nor his writings*, nor his manner of teaching ever savoured in the least anything of pedantry' (italics added).[82] One of those unpedantic writings, perhaps composed late in 1642 or early in 1643 (but more probably later, when there was a second 'addition of some scholars'), was a simplified Latin grammar. The other was an Art of Logic, written in Latin and attempting to clarify the system of logic set forth in the *Dialectica* of Peter Ramus, the system Milton had studied at Cambridge. Both these works will be discussed in my next chapter. Two other compositions, never completed and published but probably also begun in these days of schoolteaching, were a Latin thesaurus and a companion Greek thesaurus. Mentioning resumption of work on the former about 1655, Edward Phillips called it 'a new Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ, according to the manner of Stephanus, a work he had been long since collecting from his own reading, and still went on with it at times, even very near to his dying day'.[83] This compilation may have contributed some illustrative phrases to the Latin grammar. Whenever it was begun, there is reason to believe that Milton did little or no work on it in the period 1644–7.

By mid-July 1644, not quite a year after its original appearance, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* had been 'twice printed, twice bought up'. The book had been much commended for its 'fine language', and its reasoning had been applauded by some 'men of mature judgement'. But Milton was more than ever vexed by the public reception of his ideas. There were 'many rumours of confutations and convictions forthcoming', but none appeared. During the summer he was told 'that *The Doctrine of Divorce* was answered, and the answer half printed against the first edition, not by one, but by a pack of heads, of whom the chief, by circumstance, was intimated . . . to be no other . . . than an actual serving-man . . . turned solicitor. And having conversed much with a stripling divine or two of those newly-fledge probationers that usually come scouting from the University . . . these made the champerty, he contributed the law, and both joined in the divinity.'[84] Milton's friends advised him to ignore 'the buzz of such a drone's nest' whenever it should be printed, and he agreed. The summer passed; it was not printed.

In all this time his traducers had clamoured at a distance, 'and never once vouchsafed a friendly conference with the author, who would be glad and thankful to be shown an error, either by private dispute or public answer'. Such treatment was exasperating. Milton wanted to argue with someone; to be repudiated as an advocate of licence was almost more than he could bear. Unshaken in his convictions, he could honestly say, 'I felt no difference within me from that peace and firmness of mind which is of nearest kin to patience and contentment'; but if just one of his maligners would answer him in print, that would be something. He stood 'ready, in a fair and Christianly discussive way, to debate and sift this matter to the utmost ounce of learning and religion'. It was particularly irritating to be spurned 'by some, of whose profession and supposed knowledge' he had entertained 'better hope'. What 'a perverse age, eager in the reformation of names and ceremonies, but in realities as traditional and as ignorant as their forefathers'! He would not soon forgive his former friends among the Presbyterians.[85]

He had a surprise for them. When he published his translation of Martin Bucer on divorce, there would be a motto on the title page, a question from John iii. 10: 'Art thou a teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things?' The quotation carried both taunt and triumph. It was not the business of a layman to know about the opinions of Bucer, but it was decidedly the business of the clergy. If the clergy knew that Bucer's views on marriage and divorce were substantially the same as Milton's, why did they damn *The Doctrine and Discipline* as 'new and scandalous'? If they did not know the views of one of the foremost leaders in the English Reformation, what kind of clergy were they? They could not 'now make that licentious doctrine in another which was never blamed or confuted in Bucer or in Fagius'. The translation, if it did not silence slander, should at least provoke controversy. If Milton's was 'a capacity which they despised', what about the same reasoning from the man whom King Edward VI had appointed Professor of Divinity at Cambridge? God had 'unexpectedly raised up as it were from the dead more than one famous light of the first reformation to bear witness' with Milton and to do him honour. Bucer would be 'his defence and warrant against the gross imputation of broaching licence'; the translation would prove him 'to be no forger of new and loose opinions.' Furthermore, the clergy had lost their opportunity to answer Milton singly: 'Now their work is more than doubled; and how they will hold up their heads against the sudden aspect of these two great and reverend saints [Bucer and Fagius] whom they have defamed, how they will make good the censuring of that for a novelty of licence which Bucer constantly taught to be a pure and holy law of Christ's kingdom, let them advise.'[86] He looked forward to their public answer.

The translation was registered on 15 July 1644, having first been officially licensed by John Downham, the elderly rector of All Hallows the Great (father of George Downham, whom Milton had known as a student at Christ's College). It was published about three weeks later, on or a little before August 6, just before the Westminster Assembly of divines resumed sessions after a fortnight's vacation. The revised edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline* had been addressed to both the Parliament and the Assembly; the translation of Bucer was addressed to the Parliament only. Its title page, with the pointed motto (aimed at the Assembly) and the stamp of respectability ('Publisht by Authoritie'), fully described Milton's hopeful purpose: *The Judgement of Martin Bucer, concerning Divorce. Writt'n to Edward the sixt, in his second Book of the Kingdom of Christ. And now Englisht. Wherin a late Book restoring the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce is heer confirm'd and justify'd by the authoritie of Martin Bucer. To the Parlament of England.* The printer-publisher was Matthew Simmons, who had helped publish the original divorce tract.[87]

Milton either translated or epitomized chapters 15 to 47 inclusive of the second book of Bucer's *De Regno Christi ad Edw. VI*, from the edition published in *Scripta Anglicana* (Basle, 1577). The result is a pamphlet of forty quarto pages, of which twenty-four present Bucer's opinions. The tract begins with four pages of testimonies to Bucer's excellence in the exposition of Scripture, collected under such venerable names as Calvin, Cheke, and Beza—thirteen in all—followed by a brief summary of similar testimonies to Paulus Fagius. The next eight pages are a prefatory note to the Parliament, to which Milton signed his name. After the translated material there are two pages of postscript by the translator, who confesses that he 'never could delight in long citations, much less in whole traductions, whether it be natural disposition or education in me, or that my mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator.'

The preface to Parliament is both a tactful appeal to that body and a confident challenge to the clerical opposition. Milton makes certain that England's lawmakers realize the high respectability of Bucer, and he reminds them that they are providentially completing the work of reformation which Bucer helped begin. Since it was one of the great man's last wishes 'that what he had in this his last book written to King Edward concerning discipline might have place in this kingdom', it is surely providential that Milton has already made some of these recommendations quite independently, and is now able to produce Bucer's own words. He has translated only part of the book because reformation of a commonwealth should be orderly, and the family is the foundation of all society. Parliament should begin at once an examination of canonical literality in the matter of divorce, which is 'of such prime concernment both to Christian and civil welfare' (17). Since God formerly used Bucer to convert the Church of Strasbourg to a more humane attitude towards divorce, 'it can be no strange thing if in this age He stir up by whatsoever means whom it pleases Him to take in hand and maintain the same assertion. Certainly if it be in man's discerning to sever providence from chance, I could allege many instances wherein there would appear cause to esteem of me no other than a passive instrument under some Power and Counsel higher and better than can be human, working to a general good in the whole course of this matter' (11).

Milton tells Parliament something of what has already happened: his unassisted discovery of the truth, the calumny that greeted his proposal, the unexpected support of Grotius and Fagius and, finally, Bucer. He congratulates himself on having been 'a collateral teacher' with Bucer, and feels that his detractors are due 'a round reproof' for 'their unadvised rashness'. Since his proposal was 'not recovered, but plainly twice born', it should be reverently received 'as from a divine hand' (17). And since God has joined the name of Milton with the names of Fagius and Bucer 'necessarily in the good or evil report of this doctrine', the integrity of Milton is therefore vindicated. Not, he adds, 'not that I have now more confidence by the addition of these great authors to my party, for what I wrote was not my opinion, but my knowledge, even then, when I could trace no footstep in the way I went. Nor that I think to win upon your apprehensions with numbers and with names, rather than with reasons' (19). He has always disliked the appeal to great names as a substitute for honest argument. Besides, Fagius and Bucer are dead, whereas he is alive and eager to debate the matter. He has trusted Parliament before as a protector of just liberties—'nor doth the event hitherto (for some reasons which I shall not here deliver) fail me of what I conceived so highly' (13).

Had Parliament, or some of its members, thus far protected Milton from censorship or punishment? Subsequent events lend support to such a hypothesis, which is suggested by the cryptic remark just quoted. But the brief postscript to Milton's translation makes it clear that, if such had been the case, the old ecclesiastical thraldom 'under new shapes and disguises' had begun afresh to grow upon England. The final words of this postscript are both a grim warning to Parliament and a foretaste of the writer's next pamphlet, the *Areopagitica*. If, says Milton, other men's books dealing with divorce can be printed often,

> and mine containing but the same thing shall in a time of reformation, a time of free speaking, free writing, not find a permission to the press, I refer me to wisest men whether truth be suffered to be truth, or liberty to be liberty, now among us, and be not again in danger of new fetters and captivity after all our hopes and labours lost: and whether learning be not (which our enemies too prophetically feared) in the way to be trodden down again by ignorance. Whereof while time is, out of the faith owing to God and my country, I bid this kingdom

> beware—and doubt not but God, who hath dignified this Parliament already to so many glorious degrees, will also give them (which is a singular blessing) to inform themselves rightly in the midst of an unprincipled age, and to prevent this working mystery of ignorance and ecclesiastical thraldom which under new shapes and disguises begins afresh to grow upon us. [61]

What pamphlet of Milton did 'not find a permission to the press'? The translation was duly licensed, registered, and published. But the second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton tells us, had been exhausted before the translation appeared, and we know that a third edition (a reprint of the second) was not forthcoming until the following year—five or more months later. Since it is almost inconceivable that either Milton or his publisher was unwilling to meet so obvious a demand, can we doubt that Presbyterian members of the Assembly had succeeded in imposing a temporary censorship? News of this galling interference with free writing had apparently reached Milton after his preface had been composed, but there was still time to mention it in an unplanned postscript. That Milton wrote the postscript after the preceding material was already in print is further suggested by the fact that the views of Erasmus on divorce are there noted for the first time. Let us also recall that the translation, although registered on 15 July, did not appear until about 6 August.

Milton had pinned great hopes on *The Judgement of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce*. He had believed that by bringing so venerable a name to his support he could shame his clerical detractors and inspire an argument based on reason and learning. But he was never more mistaken in his life.

His disillusion began one week after the translation was available to readers. On Tuesday, 13 August, Herbert Palmer of the Westminster Assembly preached before both Houses of Parliament a sermon boldly rebuking the legislators for eluding the late Covenant and for permitting an ungodly toleration under the pretence of liberty of conscience. Error, he pointed out, must not be tolerated under any pretence. To illustrate the horrid results of laxity, he cited seven extreme examples, one of which was doubtless reported to Milton promptly: 'If any plead . . . for divorce for other causes than Christ and His apostles mention (of which a wicked book is abroad and uncensured, though deserving to be burnt, whose author hath been so impudent as to set his name to it and dedicate it to yourselves) . . . will you grant a toleration for all this?'[88]

The 'clamouring afar off', which had hitherto provoked Milton, was ended. He was now publicly condemned, and the Parliament of England had been urged to burn his divorce pamphlet. The Commons had already (9 August) ordered the public burning of *The Bloudy Tenent* by one Roger Williams, having been pressed to this censure by the Assembly. Would *The Doctrine and Discipline* be next?

Milton was furious. This rash Puritan, Palmer, 'having scarce read the book, nor knowing him who writ it (or at least feigning the latter), hath not forborn to scandalize him, unconferred with, unadmonished, undealt with by any pastorly or brotherly convincement, in the most open and invective manner, and at the most bitter opportunity that drift or set design could have invented. And this, whenas the Canon Law (though commonly most favouring the boldness of their priests) punishes the naming or traducing of any person in the pulpit, was by him made no scruple.' Palmer had, in effect, condemned as 'wicked' not only Milton but also Martin Bucer. It was 'by a good providence' that the translation had been published 'about a week before this calumnious digression was preached'. Nevertheless, Milton was taken aback by the incitement of Parliament; he had not expected 'reproaches of this bulk and size' even from the hostile Assembly. It was a blow to the sturdiest equanimity.[89]

Within two weeks after hearing Palmer's sermon, the House of Commons initiated a formal inquiry into the divorce pamphlet. The immediate provocation was a petition from the Company of Stationers, received on or before Saturday, 24 August, and apparently containing (the petition is now lost) a complaint against this among other unlicensed and unregistered publications. The petition was read in the Commons on Monday, 26 August, and ordered to be referred to the Committee for Printing, which was instructed to hear all parties, prepare an ordinance covering the matter, and submit the ordinance speedily to the House. The Committee was further instructed 'diligently to inquire out the authors, printers, and publishers of the pamphlets against the immortality of the soul and concerning divorce.'[90]

We do not know what action, if any, the Committee took against Milton. The surviving records are so fragmentary that they suggest a parliamentary effort to evade, not only the stationers in their grievances against Milton's disregard for regulations, but also the Westminster Assembly in its crusade against toleration. For example, there is no record of any report to the Commons, speedy or otherwise, from the Committee for Printing; yet, on 18 September, the Lords were asked by the Commons to concur in a new printing ordinance, the nature of which is not specified. There is no record, moreover, of the Lords concurring in any such ordinance. As late as 28 December, two wardens of the Stationers Company appeared before the Lords and, after apologizing for not discovering the author or printer of a recent libel against the peerage, 'further complained of the frequent printing of scandalous books by divers, as Hezekiah Woodward and John Milton'. Hearing this, the Lords ordered the gentleman-usher to attach the two schoolmaster-authors, Woodward and Milton, and bring them before two judges, Reeves and Bacon, for an examination. The stationers were ordered to be present at this examination and to give evidence against the accused parties. Three days later, 31 December, Woodward's case was reported to the Lords, and his release was ordered. There is no surviving report on Milton.[91]

In the curious absence of official evidence, we must turn to the account of Milton's anonymous biographer: 'The Assembly of Divines then sitting at Westminster, though formerly obliged by his learned pen in the defence of Smectymnuus and other their controversies with the bishops, now impatient of having the clergy's jurisdiction (as they reckoned it) invaded, instead of answering or disproving what those books had asserted, caused him to be summoned for them before the Lords. But that House, whether approving the doctrine, or not favouring his accusers, soon dismissed him.'[92] We must also consider Milton's own comments, written two or three months after the Lords had ordered his examination. He reminds Parliament that he had dedicated to them his divorce pamphlet:

> And that ye took it so as wise and impartial men, obtaining so great power and dignity, are wont to accept in matters both doubtful and important what they think offered them well meant, and from a rational ability, I had no less than to persuade me. . . . For although it be generally known how and by whom ye have been instigated to a hard censure of that former book . . . I do not find yet that aught, for the furious incitements which have been used, hath issued by your appointment that might give the least interruption or disrepute either to the author or to the book. . . . For which uprightness and incorrupt refusal of what ye were incensed to, Lords and Commons (though it were done to justice, not to me, and was a peculiar demonstration how far your ways are different from the rash vulgar), . . . I have yet a store of gratitude laid up which cannot be exhausted, and such thanks perhaps they may live to be as shall more than whisper to the next ages. [*Tetrachordon*, IV. 63-64]

They more than whisper to us, although not so distinctly as we might wish. What Milton's words suggest is that some persons in high places had an eye on him from the start of his career, regarding him perhaps as an eloquent *enfant terrible*, impractical but learned and stimulating, one certainly not to be treated like an ordinary ink-stained fanatic.[93]

However this may be, during August, September, and October of 1644 Milton had good reason to feel anxious about the future of free speech in England. He was disgusted by the hypocritical attitude of the booksellers, and thoroughly disillusioned by his former Presbyterian friends. 'If some who but of late were little better than silenced from preaching shall come now to silence us from reading, except what they please, it cannot be guessed what is intended by some but a second tyranny over learning—and will soon put it out of controversy that bishops and presbyters are the same to us, both name and thing.' He was beginning to think that it might be necessary to treat these power-hungry ministers as the prelates had been treated, 'to suppress the suppressors themselves, whom the change of their condition hath puffed up more than their late experience of harder times hath made wise.' Not a few of the Presbyterians had, like Milton, published books against the bishops without troubling to have them registered. He hoped 'that none of those were the persuaders to renew upon us this bondage which they themselves have wrought so much good by contemning.'[94]

The reformation was 'slow moving', but he continued to have faith in Parliament. He expected little from the Westminster Assembly; indeed, he was now ready to admit publicly that he had never 'found cause to think that the tenth part of learning stood or fell with the clergy' (323). When God 'shakes a kingdom with strong and healthful commotions to a general reforming', He habitually 'raises to His own work men of rare abilities' to revise old truth and discover new; and 'these His chosen' are often laymen. The clergy have no more monopoly of reformation than they have of learning, despite their pretences; and they should not be permitted by England's Parliament to stop the mouths of 'those whom God hath fitted for the special use of these times with eminent and ample gifts' (350–1). It was stupid of the ministers not to make distinctions, not to recognize the unusual talents of such persons, even if they could not accept their opinions. If they feared opinions as new and dangerous, why did they not attempt to confute them in public debate? If the opinions were wrong, reason could prove them wrong. Truth never lost to falsehood 'in a free and open encounter' (347). 'When a man hath been labouring the hardest labour in the deep mines of knowledge, hath furnished out his findings in all their equipage, drawn forth his reasons as it were a battle ranged, scattered and defeated all objections in his way, calls out his adversary into the plain, offers him the advantage of wind and sun if he please, only that he may try the matter by dint of argument—for his opponents then to skulk, to lay ambushments, to keep a narrow bridge of licensing where the challenger should pass, though it be valour enough in soldiership, is but weakness and cowardice in the Wars of Truth' (347–8). Milton was in a fighting mood.

He discussed his predicament with some of his learned friends, who, he later informed Parliament, 'loaded me with entreaties and persuasions that I would not despair to lay together that which just reason should bring into my mind toward the removal of an undeserved thraldom upon learning' (330). They encouraged him, in fact, to present Parliament with arguments for the modification of an Act of Parliament's own making: the 'Ordinance to prevent and suppress the licence of printing', passed on 14 June 1643, and requiring that all publications be officially licensed and registered at Stationers' Hall. Milton approved of much in this Act. He agreed that the printer's (and perhaps the author's) name should be registered; he was convinced that mischievous or libellous books should be punished and suppressed. *But only after publication.* It was the licensing, the *pre*-publication censorship, that seemed to him an affront to all learning. His friends assured him that his was a 'common grievance', that he would not be disburdening a particular fancy if he attacked the ordinance. He resolved, therefore, to make the attempt.[95]

The situation called for no ordinary pamphlet. A defence of learning must be distinctively learned; a plea for liberty must manifest a spirit worthy of liberty. A classical oration seemed to Milton the most appropriate form. He would borrow the quill of Quintilian, and emulate the great speeches of Cicero and Demosthenes. In ancient times, Isocrates from his private house had written to the Athenian parliament, the court of the Areopagus, persuading them with honest eloquence to change their very government. Might not a modern *Areopagitica* prevail upon a modern Parliament, with honest English eloquence, to give men 'the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties'?

Choosing the title for his oration, Milton hoped that it would frighten away the wrong kind of reader. (His next three tracts were to be given Greek titles; he was still sorry that he had not written his *Doctrine and Discipline* in Latin, despite his devotion to his native language.) He may also have remembered with ironic satisfaction that throughout the Smectymnuan controversy there had run a quarrel over the misuse of a word. In the first tract of his Presbyterian friends there was a reference to the *Areopagi*, which, as Bishop Hall was quick to point out, was 'the name of the place, not of the men'. Smectymnuus tried to defend its collective scholarship; Milton came to their aid in his *Animadversions*; but Hall merely laughed and repeated his correction. In the *Modest Confutation* against Milton the subject was revived, and Milton's explanations were ridiculed. Now he was formally addressing the English Areopagus in the name of unclerical learning, and against many of those Presbyterians whose cause he had once espoused. He did not miss the irony of the *situation*; perhaps he also enjoyed the irony which figured in the word.

The *Areopagitica* strikes a note of noble confidence in its long opening paragraph, and manages to sustain it for forty impassioned pages. The oration begins, and ends, with the assertion that 'when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained that wise men look for.' If the oration is heard, the very listening will prove that England is 'already in good part arrived'. Parliament, moreover, will manifest its true greatness and magnanimity if it 'acknowledges and obeys the voice of reason from what quarter soever it be heard speaking'. Milton had eulogized Parliament before, in his *Apology* of 1642; but he offers now a better covenant of his fidelity, for he not only extols what has been nobly done, but also declares 'as freely what might be done better'. He fears not this highest form of praise, since Parliament has hitherto imitated the elegant humanity of Greece, which honoured and listened to 'men who professed the study of wisdom and eloquence'. Writing 'from the industry of a life wholly dedicated to studious labours', Milton is confident that he, too, will be heard. He is animated by the 'joy and gratulation' felt by all men 'who wish and promote their country's liberty' (293–7).

Following this masterpiece of polished diplomacy, there is a passage so memorable in its word-magic that we are in some danger of overlooking its shrewdness of argument. Milton grants that books can be dangerous, can be deserving of punishment. From this apparent concession, however, he develops the theme of literature's vitality and importance:

> For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth, but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. [297–8]

Great literature influences countless generations, and the loss of a truth means that whole nations fare the worse.

In a compendious historical survey, Milton next traces the background of licensing. In ancient Greece and Rome the magistrates passed judgement only upon books which were libellous or blasphemous, and they censored nothing in advance of circulation. The early Christian emperors were no more severe, prohibiting heretical books only after they had been examined and condemned by the Councils. To illustrate these former attitudes, Milton notes various writings which might have been suppressed in a less enlightened age, and then shows that licensing, in its origin, was a policy 'to no other purpose but to obstruct and hinder the first approach of Reformation'. It was, indeed, a desperate invention of the Inquisition and the anti-Christian Council of Trent, a product of presumptuous tyranny—'as if St. Peter had bequeathed them the keys of the press also, out of paradise'. He ridicules the machinery of this Romish innovation, especially the exorcizing *imprimatur*, often absurdly antiphonal. Having crept out of oppression, licensing was later, he says, caught up by the English prelates, although it was eschewed by other reformed churches abroad. Englishmen of the second reformation should, therefore, suspect the fruit of such a tree, even if Parliament, without sinister intention, had been persuaded to sanction it. Its planters were those whom Parliament itself is loath to own (299–306).

The free reading of all sorts of books, Milton submits, is essential to the attainment of truth and to the growth of virtue. Harm is done, of course, but it is harm which does not disappear with licensing. Books cannot defile unless the will and conscience are already defiled, and the 'best books to a naughty mind are not unappliable to occasions of evil.' If such men are to be protected, therefore, all controversial books, all books anywhere describing evil, must be kept from them—a censorship of not only the heathen writers but the Church Fathers and the Bible itself.

Furthermore, a censorship of personal influence will be needed too, for although the ignorant are not seduced by foreign or popish books, the learned sometimes are, and the learned may spread the infection. Licensing is a vain and impossible attempt to prevent harm; in fact, it produces harm, because, as Christendom discovered when Julian the Apostate forbade the study of heathen writers, books 'which are likeliest to taint both life and doctrine cannot be suppressed without the fall of learning, and of all ability in disputation'. 'To all men such books are not temptations nor vanities'; to the discreet and judicious reader they 'serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate.' 'A wise man will make better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool will do of sacred Scripture.' The learned Selden, a member of Parliament, had made this point convincingly in his study of natural and national laws. But Milton would insist further that free reading is essential to the development of virtue through experience. God left the diet of the human mind, like the diet of the body, within the governing of 'every mature man', entrusting him 'with the gift of reason to be his own chooser', not binding him 'under a perpetual childhood of prescription'. This fact makes possible the great virtue of temperance. 'Good and evil, we know, in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably', and the knowledge of one involves knowledge of the other. Indeed,

> what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue, therefore, which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure . . . Since, therefore, the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates, and hearing all manner of reason?

This, in Milton's judgement, is the *moral* benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read (306–15).

He then develops further his thesis that licensing, as an external restraint, 'conduces nothing to the end for which it was framed'. To be sure, Plato had recommended licensing in connexion with 'other provisos there set down in his fancied Republic, which in this world could have no place'. But the Greeks had not approved Plato's counsel, and he plainly did not follow it in his own writing or reading. It should be obvious that 'one kind of strictness' is not enough to protect the mind from corruption; 'evil manners are as perfectly learned without books a thousand other ways which cannot be stopped'. A magistrate *consistent* in folly would go beyond mere licensing and attempt to 'regulate all other things of like aptness to corrupt the mind'—would regulate all pastimes and recreations, all music and dancing, would license windows and balconies, eating and drinking, dress and mixed conversation. These things, of course, 'will be, and must be; but how they shall be least hurtful, how least enticing, herein consists the grave and governing wisdom of a State. To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian polities, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition . . .' Licensing and laws are not the solution. The solution, declares Milton, lies in the 'unconstraining laws of virtuous education, religious and civil nurture'.

> Here the great art lies to discern in what the law is to bid restraint and punishment, and in what things persuasion only is to work. If every action which is good or evil in man at ripe years were to be under pittance and prescription and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just, or continent? . . . Wherefore did [God] create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue? They are not skilful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin . . . Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure, he has yet one jewel left—ye cannot bereave him of his covetousness. . . . Suppose we could expel sin by this means. Look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of virtue, for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike. . . . Why should we then affect a rigour contrary to the manner of God and of nature, by abridging or scanting those means, which books freely permitted are, both to the trial of virtue and the exercise of truth? . . . And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil-doing. [318–20]

Good government and human morality aside, the licensing order is still ineffective, Milton continues. A court libel against the Parliament, actually published in London, appears weekly. The law does not prevent the circulation of scandalous and unlicensed books already published, nor does it control the importation of foreign books. The present licensers are tired and harassed by their jobs, yet a multitude of licensers will be needed if censorship is to be thorough. Books partly useful and partly culpable must be expurgated and edited for publication. An Index of forbidden reading will be needed (on the Romish model). Something must be done about those sects which spread by *oral* tradition. And, above all, if licensing is to avoid mistakes, every licenser must be 'a man above the common measure, both studious, learned, and judicious'—a man, in other words, of sufficient worth to refuse such tedious and time-wasting activity (314–23).

With all its futility, the licensing order is a threat and indignity to learning, a hindrance to efficient publishing, an undervaluing of English genius, and a grave impediment to both the second reformation and the endless search for truth. It is 'the greatest discouragement and affront that can be offered to learning and to learned men', especially to 'the free and ingenuous sort of such as evidently were born to study, and love learning for itself, not for lucre or any other end but the service of God and of truth, and perhaps that lasting fame and perpetuity of praise which God and good men have consented shall be the reward of those whose published labours advance the good of mankind' (323-4). Such men need no tutors or examiners; they are humiliated, and learning itself is shackled, when 'the pastor of a small unlearned parish on the sudden shall be exalted archbishop over a large diocese of books' (331).

> When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him. If in this the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities can bring him to that state of maturity as not to be still mistrusted and suspected, unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings and expense of Palladian oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, . . . and if he be not repulsed or slighted, must appear in print like a puny with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety that he is no idiot or seducer, it cannot be but a dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of Learning. [324-5]

In such servility 'how can a man teach with authority, which is the life of teaching'? Suppose, too, that he is 'so copious of fancy as to have many things well worth the adding come into his mind after licensing, while the book is yet under the press'; this may happen a dozen times in one book to 'the best and diligentest writers', and each addition must be officially approved. Is the press to stand still while the licenser is sought?

The existing law is more than an affront to authorship; it is 'an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation', since no twenty licensers can comprehend the countless facets of the English genius, a genius too rich and precious to be thus restrained. It is a popish trick, moreover, to treat the populace as potential criminals, to distrust the laity, to assume that the common people are weak in faith and weaker in discretion. The intelligent reader wants the state as his governor, not as his critic, for the very nature of licensing involves approval only of such common stuff as 'is vulgarly received already'. Freedom of writing is particularly essential now, 'while things are yet not constituted in religion', and while there is the bright hope of Parliament leading England 'to such a deliverance as shall never be forgotten by any revolution of time that this world hath to finish.' This deliverance was only begun with the removal of prelacy, although the Presbyterians act 'as if our reformation sought no more but to make room for others into their seats under another name'. Liberty of publishing is still as important as it once was; domestic and political reforms remain to be accomplished; and the public challenging of accepted opinion is vital to the process. The light we have is to be used in the search for further truth; it is not given us 'to be ever staring on', which might turn all black. Truth must flow continually, as from a fountain, without impediment; 'our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise'. Licensing destroys this inward exercise, substituting a frozen conformity, 'an obedient unanimity'. Censorship 'hinders and retards the importation of our richest merchandise, truth' (326–38).

As for toleration and the Assembly's fear of sects, Milton repeats his insistence that free controversy is essential to true reforming. Truth needs no licensing to make her victorious; truth will eventually carry the field. Indeed, it is 'not impossible that she may have more shapes than one.' Parliament should listen, therefore, to any sincere person who seeks to speed the reformation. It is more wholesome 'that many be tolerated rather than all compelled', for, whatever its disadvantages, toleration is preferable to 'a rigid external formality' in religion. In saying this, Milton does not mean that he would tolerate popery or open superstition, impiety or evil; he is thinking of 'neighbouring differences' in doctrine or discipline within the essential unity of Protestantism. These are but branches from the same firm root, as he sees them.

The English are truly a wonderful people, again displaying evidence of God's special favour, as in the days of the first Reformation. Consider London, the mansion-house of liberty, filled with eager citizens 'sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching reformation'. What more can one ask of a people? That controversy should flourish while the city is threatened by hostile armies argues great confidence in Parliament and great courage in the citizens. A cheerful and vital people—a nation of free consciences, Christian liberties, and high hopes for the future—'yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectaries'. Surely, to persons wise in spiritual architecture, they are plainly building the house of God. Let there be, then, no fears of toleration when so many hands are needed for the work ahead. The fields are white; the harvest waits; and England is 'a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep'. If, in the midst of so much readiness for high attempts, Parliament would suppress opinion, let Parliament realize that it will be only suppressing itself.

> If it be desired to know the immediate cause of all this free writing and free speaking, there cannot be assigned a truer than your own mild, and free, and human government; it is the liberty, Lords and Commons, which your own valorous and happy counsels have purchased us, liberty which is the nurse of all great wits. This is that which hath rarified and enlightened our spirits like the

influence of heaven; this is that which hath enfranchised, enlarged, and lifted up our apprehensions degrees above themselves. Ye cannot make us now less capable, less knowing, less eagerly pursuing of the truth, unless ye first make yourselves, that made us so, less the lovers, less the founders of our true liberty.

If Parliament but acts like itself, it will follow the wise advice of its own member, the late Lord Brooke, on toleration. It will realize that 'where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.' It will grant, moreover, to the good men of England, eager to assist in the great work ahead, 'the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.'

This is the plea of Milton's *Areopagitica*, which was published on or slightly before 23 November 1644.[96] The full title of the pamphlet is *Areopagitica; a Speech of Mr. John Milton For the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, To the Parlament of England.* The title page carries also a quotation from the *Supplices* of Euripides, both in the Greek (partly circled in Milton's own copy, which has survived) and in Milton's translation:

This is true Liberty, when freeborn men
Having to advise the public, may speak free:
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;
Who neither can nor will may hold his peace.
What can be juster in a state than this?

There is no printer's or bookseller's name in the imprint, for the pamphlet, unlicensed and unregistered, was an avowed challenge to the Stationers Company, the Westminster Assembly, and the existing law of the Parliament. There was no reason for the stationer to take any risk beyond that of arranging publication. Milton, on the other hand, his name in large capitals on the title page, assumed full responsibility. If anything was to happen, it should happen to him.

Nothing much happened. The Stationers Company, as we have noted, complained to the Lords, and the Lords did nothing. There was no repeal of the printing ordinance. So far as has been discovered, no explicit allusions to *Areopagitica* were published during the next decade.[97] Six months after its appearance, William Prynne published a pamphlet called a *Fresh Discovery*, one chapter of which was devoted to recent attacks upon the licensing law; and although he assailed Henry Robinson, John Lilburne, and the anonymous tracts of Richard Overton, he completely ignored Milton. Still, let it be said again, Milton was not punished. During the following year his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was twice reprinted,[98] and he published two additional pamphlets without benefit of licensing or registration. Five years later, in May 1649, Gilbert Mabbott asked the House of Commons to discharge him from the office of licenser, and his arguments were the arguments of Milton even though Milton was not directly quoted.[99] In 1651, Christopher Arnold wrote a long letter to a friend about English books and personalities of the day; and closing a paragraph devoted almost entirely to the writings of the learned Selden, he cited and described *Areopagitica*. It was the only one of Milton's writings so noticed.[100] Still later, in 1673, two of Andrew Marvell's opponents cited passages from *Areopagitica* in order to embarrass Milton's protégé. One of them called it 'fustian bombast'; but he conceded that it had 'passed for stately wit and sense' in an age of reformation.[101]

While these facts do not tell us directly what we would like to know, their implications are important. The *Areopagitica* had no practical effect, but it was known. Its title, its poetical appeal to reason and idealism, its scrupulous neglect of details and expedients, account perhaps for its being ignored by the tooth-and-nail pamphleteers of the decade. But Milton's noble plea for liberty must have struck a responsive chord in many a Member of Parliament, and to a foreigner like Arnold it seemed most ingenious (*percuriosus*). The sarcastic admission, from Marvell's enemy, that the oration had 'passed for' stately wit and sense at the time of its appearance, we may accept as truth. It is otherwise difficult to explain, not only Milton's repeated boast of being a privileged author, but also his several escapes from official censure when both Commons and Lords, acting under outside pressure, ordered him to be investigated.

After more than three centuries of continuing struggle for freedom of the written word, the steady admiration of humanity has placed Milton's *Areopagitica* above my praise. Nevertheless, let me pause for general comment, not challenging the superlatives of criticism, but seeking perspective in biography. With the writing of his oration, Milton reached a new point in his intellectual development. Long a believer in liberty of speech, he was forced now, by the several attempts at suppression of his divorce pamphlet, to explore the implications of his belief. From some of them he shied away; he could not, for example, follow them so far as to accept, with Roger Williams, the necessity for complete religious liberty. The *Areopagitica* contains many reservations which the modern reader, stirred by the ringing generalities, often overlooks. The author was a recent and uncertain radical, forced by his position on free reasoning to renounce orthodox Puritanism, yet unwilling to accept the opposite extreme. He was an Independent, and an uneasy one. His conviction that he had been the instrument of new light on the divorce problem compelled his sympathy with the noisy sects, and he urged toleration, somewhat vaguely, for all good Protestants like himself. He was now only half persuaded that the reformation could be swift. He had realized, at least, that its speed was not assured by the abolition of the bishops, for he had seen Episcopacy removed and had seen other problems rush to fill the void. The anti-clerical bias occasionally implicit in the earlier pamphlets is openly avowed in *Areopagitica*. His disillusion is also apparent in his announced scorn for Atlantic and Utopian polities. He declares that the future holds a progressive discovery of new truths until the day of the Second Coming, and, while he continues to believe in the Scriptural revelation of God's will, he looks forward with confidence to the additional revelations of human reason. In stressing the importance of inner discipline, of developing virtue through rational choosing, he gives positive statement to a basic tenet of his ethical philosophy—a conviction which will animate his later writing in both poetry and prose.

The *Areopagitica* spoke for no party, and offered no solution to the pressing problems of the day. It dealt, instead, with what most of Milton's contemporaries regarded as a minor issue, and its arguments were by no means so original as was the method of presenting them. But the method is still marvellous. In its consummate skill, its throbbing zeal, its subtly controlled richness, the oration is a masterpiece of eloquence. *Areopagitica* is Milton's prose hymn of hope. It has less ardour than the first divorce tract, but it is more fervent, and far more confident. It remains its author's most sophisticated performance; nothing could be more ingratiating than its suave assumption that the reader is also a person of cultivation and learning. Elegant in its allusiveness, urbane in its argument, and versatile in its blending of humour and solemnity, the oration compliments while it challenges. It borrows power from the central tradition of Protestantism; it borrows persuasion from all the humanistic past. If Milton never wrote better in prose, it is doubtless because he never found another subject which allowed him to champion both learning and Christian liberty in the same heartfelt sentences.

During the autumn and winter of 1644, the possibility of being officially silenced must have given him some anxious moments, but certain new aspects of the opposition probably afforded him a grim satisfaction: he was beginning to be attacked, at long last, *in print!* Most of the attacks then and later were unflattering in their brevity as well as in their tone, but they were attacks, and he had been waiting for them. On or before 16 September there appeared a tract of eight pages entitled *Twelve Considerable Serious Questions touching Church Government*. Near its end, the author, the ever-crusading William Prynne, called attention to a recent increase in dangerous pamphlets—among others, one on 'divorce at pleasure'—and he hoped they would be speedily suppressed.[102] In November, Herbert Palmer's sermon before Parliament, with its recommendation that the divorce tract be burned, not only appeared in print but also ignored the support of Martin Bucer. On or before 7 February 1645 there was published a long attack on contemporary heresies by Dr. Daniel Featley entitled *The Dippers Dipt*. In the text of this book the topic of divorce was mentioned but Milton was not. However, Featley seems to have heard of some new heresies before writing his dedicatory epistle (dated 10 January), for there 'a Tractate of Divorce, in which the bonds of marriage are let loose to inordinate lust', is cited along with other recent pamphlets.[103] Milton's reaction to these almost casual attacks was to answer them publicly, each one. Having hoped in vain, 'as for a blessing, to see some piece of diligence or learned discretion come from them', he was driven to state: 'I refuse no occasion, and avoid no adversary, either to maintain what I have begun, or to give it up for better reason.'[104]

Meanwhile, on or before 19 November 1644, the full-length reply which had been rumoured in the press during the past summer—and which Milton had resolved to ignore—finally was published. It was an anonymous pamphlet of forty-four pages: *An Answer to a Book, Intituled, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, &c. Milton was very curious about its authorship. The chief author was originally reported 'and since ratified to be' none other than a former servingman turned solicitor. But Milton had also heard 'for certain' that the Rev. Joseph Caryl, 'a divine of note, out of his good will to the opinion, had taken it into his revise, and something had put out, something put in, and stuck in here and there with a clove of his own calligraphy to keep it from tainting'.[105] Caryl had acted as licenser for the *Answer*, and had added to his imprimatur the following gratuitous comment:

> To preserve the strength of the marriage-bond and the honour of that estate against those sad breaches and dangerous abuses of it which common discontents (on this side adultery) are likely to make in unstaid minds and men given to change, by taking in or grounding themselves upon the opinion answered and with good reason confuted in this treatise, I have approved the printing and publishing of it. Novemb. 14, 1644.

Whether he had anything else to do with the anonymous reply, we do not know. He was a man about six years Milton's senior, a nonconformist leader, member of the Westminster Assembly, and Lincoln's Inn preacher. An able and learned divine, he was even a moderate Independent in his thinking. But Milton, convinced of Caryl's collaboration in the *Answer*, resolved to administer a fitting castigation. The clergyman, then busily at work on a commentary on the Book of Job, was suddenly to learn what it was like to be visited by calamity which may or may not have constituted just punishment.

Anyone less baffled than Milton would have ignored the *Answer to The Doctrine and Discipline*, for it is a poor thing, feeble, pedestrian, and often obtuse. The whole point of Milton's idealistic conception of marriage had been lost on its authors, who openly confess their inability to understand what is meant by such phrases as 'the gentlest ends of marriage' and 'apt conversation'. If conversation is so important, they stickle, it would 'have been more pleasant and beneficial to Adam to have had another man created than a woman', because experience shows that 'man ordinarily exceeds woman in natural gifts of mind and in delectableness of converse'.

When Milton discusses the husband starved for compatibility, their density takes refuge in attempted humour:

> what if he do look abroad, so long as it is but to meet with a fit conversing soul, provided he meddles not with her body? . . . we may without danger let a man's reins loose to accommodate himself so, if his wife hath not such a fit conversing soul as she should have—only let him remember to come home to her at night. . . . But enough of this: only we desire the next time you write, to tell us the meaning of this fit conversing soul. We have heard that angels converse with one another as they are spirits; but for husbands and wives . . . we know no conversing with one another but what is by words or actions. . . . I wonder you should use such phrases.

Convinced that 'some sort and measure of troubles and discontent in marriage are unavoidable', committed also to a mean and conventional view of the purpose of matrimony, the authors of the *Answer* do not really know what Milton is talking about in most of his proposal. They are sure that his interpretation of Christ's words is 'corrupt and wicked', 'little less than blasphemy', but they are not at all sure of what he thinks marriage should be. ' "Mystery of joy", what language is this?' 'You are apt to speak very high language.' 'The language is too sublime and angelical for mortal creatures to comprehend it.' In short, 'this frothy discourse, were it not sugared over with a little neat language, would appear so immeritous and undeserving, so contrary to . . . common experience itself, that all that read it must needs count it worthy to be burnt by the hangman.'[106]

The argument of the reply is sometimes naïve; for example: 'If any shall think these answers to fall foul upon each other, we easily grant it, and say it's usual in this kind; and, besides, we write not as prophets but as men, and if any of the answers be to the point and overthrow that which we conceived to be an error, it's sufficient.' The *Answer* is most telling, on the other hand, when it briefly mentions certain practical objections to Milton's proposal. What will prevent men from pretending causes of divorce when none exist? What will happen to the children of divorced couples? What about the wives' legal rights in their portions or their husbands' estates? And 'to what reproach would the woman be left to, as being one left who was not fit for anyone's company?' Apart from this paragraph of pertinent questions, the argument is largely a muddle of *ergo* and *ipso facto*, with nothing much emerging, and Milton often 'he' and 'you' in the same sentence. It was particularly annoying to Milton that 'this idle pamphlet comes reeling forth against the first edition only'. The signed, revised edition had been long available, and the *Answer* in one passage even speaks of 'your house at Aldersgate Street'. In another place it declares: 'If every man were of your breeding and capacity there were some colour for this plea, for we believe you count no woman to due conversation accessible as to you, except she can speak Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French, and dispute against the canon law as well as you, or at least be able to hold discourse with you. But other gentlemen of good quality are content with meaner and fewer endowments, as you know well enough.' This may have been a hit in the dark, an inference from Milton's own argument, for there is nothing else in the *Answer* that so smacks of the personal. Milton's name is not once mentioned, and there is no hint of the fact that he is separated from his own wife. When one considers the usual nature of controversy in this period, the *Answer* is amazingly polite.[107]

But Milton countered with a storm of abuse. His 'ridiculous adversary' was (among other choice epithets) an idiot, an odious fool, an illiterate and arrogant presumer, a mongrel, a most incogitant woodcock, a brain-worm, a caitiff, an unswilled hogshead, and a phlegmy clod. Milton had never dreamed that it would be his fortune 'to be put to this under-work of scouring and unrubbishing the low and sordid ignorance of such a presumptuous losel. Yet Hercules had the labour once imposed upon him to carry dung out of the Augean stable. At any hand I would be rid of him—for I had rather, since the life of man is likened to a scene, that all my entrances and exits might mix with such persons only whose worth erects them and their actions to a grave and tragic deportment, and not to have to do with clowns and vices.' It was an 'ignoble task', 'a despicable encounter', but 'for the satisfaction of others', Milton explained, 'I endure all this'. Convinced that his 'profound opposite' with the frigid brain had been 'set on by plot and consultation with a junto of clergymen and licensers', he decided to kill a number of like-feathered birds with one rough stone.[108]

On or before 4 March 1645 the castigation was published with the title, *Colasterion: a Reply to a nameless answer against The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. Wherein the trivial Author of that Answer is discover'd, the Licencer conferr'd with, and the Opinion which they traduce defended. By the former Author, J. M.*[109] Unlicensed and unregistered, the pamphlet contained neither printer's nor bookseller's name on its title page—only 'Printed in the Year, 1645' and the motto: 'Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit' (Proverbs xxvi. 5). It began with a few words for Mr. Prynne, whose heedless reference to 'divorce at pleasure' called for reprimand. Meeting this 'jolly slander', Milton said,

> I stood a while and wondered what we might do to a man's heart, or what anatomy use, to find in it sincerity; for all our wonted marks every day fail us, and where we thought it was, we see it is not . . . Whenas one, above others, who hath suffered much and long in the defence of truth, shall after all this give her cause to leave him so destitute and so vacant of her defence as to yield his mouth to be the common road of truth and falsehood, and such falsehood as is joined with the rash and heedless calumny of his neighbour. . . . It will be just, therefore, and best for the reputation of him who in his *subitanes* hath thus censured, to recall his sentence. And if, out of the abundance of his volumes, and the readiness of his quill, and the vastness of his other employments, especially in the

great audit for accounts, he can spare us aught to the better understanding of this point, he shall be thanked in public, and what hath offended in the book shall willingly submit to his correction. [233–4]

Milton felt injured by Prynne's thoughtlessness, but he reproved the Puritan martyr with hopeful respect; a public argument with *him* might amount to something. The 'peasantly rudeness' of Mr. Caryl, the licenser, was in another case:

> you are reputed a man discreet enough, religious enough, honest enough—that is, to an ordinary competence in all these. But now your turn is to hear what your own hand hath earned ye, that when you suffered this nameless hangman to cast into public such a despiteful contumely upon a name and person deserving of the Church and State equally to yourself, and one who hath done more to the present advancement of your own tribe than you or many of them have done for themselves, you forgot to be either honest, religious, or discreet. Whatever the State might do concerning it, supposed a matter to expect evil from, I should not doubt to meet among them with wise and honourable and knowing men. But as to this brute libel, so much the more impudent and lawless for the abused authority which it bears, I say again that I abominate the censure of rascals and their licensers. [267]

It infuriated Milton that 'a licenser is not contented now to give his single imprimatur, but brings his chair into the title leaf' (238–9).

He saved most of his scorn, however, for the puny clerk, the 'ponderous confuter, elected by his ghostly patrons' (266), who chiefly produced the anonymous *Answer*. With this wretched person—reported 'a servingman both by nature and by function, an idiot by breeding, and a solicitor by presumption' (255)—Milton did not so much argue as romp verbally. The other's logic was childish, his legal gibberish was absurd, his Greek and Hebrew were faulty, and his language was 'a low and homespun expression of his mother English' (236). 'I mean not to dispute philosophy with this pork, who never read any', Milton exclaimed (250); he had made 'himself a fool in print, with confuting books which are above him' (257). Only people 'of gentle breeding' (261) will understand what is meant by the gentlest ends of marriage: 'There is one society of grave Friendship, and another amiable and attractive society of Conjugal Love—besides the deed of procreation, which of itself soon cloys and is despised unless it be cherished and re-incited with a pleasing conversation—which if ignoble and swainish minds cannot apprehend, shall such merit therefore to be the censurers of more generous and virtuous spirits?' (254). This passage is typical of Milton's defence in *Colasterion*; he did not consider his opponent deserving of elaborate refutation. He confessed, however, 'that disagreement of mind or disposition, though in much sharpness, is not always a just cause of divorce; for much may be endured' (241). A just cause, he explained, must be intolerable sharpness; 'burdens may be borne, but still with consideration to the strength of an honest man complaining' (243). As for adultery, it 'makes not the marriage void, nor much more unfit, but for the time, if the offended party forgive; but unfitness and contrariety frustrates and nullifies for ever, unless it be a rare chance, all the good and peace of wedded conversation' (245). And as for possible abuse of a more charitable law of divorce, such should not 'be withheld from good men because others likely enough may abuse it to their pleasure' (234).

Milton closes the *Colasterion* with an invitation to his opponent. Would he like to become famous? 'Let him but send me how he calls himself, and I may chance not fail to endorse him on the backside of posterity, not a golden, but a Brazen Ass. Since my fate extorts from me a talent of sport which I had thought to hide in a napkin, . . . perhaps, as the provocation may be, I may be driven to curl up this gliding prose into a rough Sotadic, that shall rime him into such a condition as, instead of judging good books to be burned by the executioner, he shall be readier to be his own hangman. Thus much to this nuisance.' Finally, 'though the whole dispute be strewed and scattered with ridiculous', he still hopes that some learned person will come forward with a sober rebuttal:

> If any man equal to the matter shall think it appertains him to take in hand this controversy, either excepting against aught written, or persuaded he can show better how this question of such moment to be thoroughly known may receive a true determination, not leaning on the old and rotten suggestions whereon it yet leans; if his intents be sincere to the public, and shall carry him on without bitterness to the opinion or to the person dissenting, let him not, I entreat him, guess by the handling which meritoriously hath been bestowed on this object of contempt and laughter, that I account it any displeasure done me to be contradicted in print, but as it leads to the attainment of anything more true, shall esteem it a benefit, and shall know how to return his civility and fair argument in such a sort as he shall confess that to do so is my choice—and to have done thus was my chance. [272–3]

It was not in Milton's destiny, however, to be answered with 'civility and fair argument'. The invitation was ignored, as those before it had been.

Although brief (twenty-seven pages), the *Colasterion* was almost four months in coming forth against the anonymous *Answer*. It was, in fact, by-play, a blast incidental to Milton's main activity in the period following *Areopagitica*. His time was chiefly occupied in composing the longest and the most thoughtful of all his pamphlets thus far produced. Some of his judicious friends had told him that his *Doctrine of Divorce*, although it 'had of reason in it to a sufficiency', was inadequate in its exposition of the Scriptures. Still others had suggested that his argument could be made more convincing by the addition of 'authorities and citations'. Amenable to this advice and eager to make the strongest possible presentation of his case, he set himself the double labour of ransacking the literature of Protestant theology and of producing a thorough specimen of biblical exegesis. It was a long and tedious task, an exaction of the severest mental discipline. In some respects it was a distasteful task, because he had earlier damned the bishops for appealing to authority instead of resting upon Scripture and right reason; and he was still persuaded, personally, that testimony 'doth not solidly fetch the truth by multiplicity of authors, nor argue a thing false by the few that hold so'. So great, however, was his desire to make his point, that he now returned to the Fathers of the primitive Church for support, and even looked into a few of the hated councils, since 'most men from their youth so accustom as not to scan reason, nor clearly to apprehend it, but to trust for that the names and numbers of such as have got (and many times undeservedly) the reputation among them to know much . . .'[110] Not bothering to conceal his contempt for some, he was disposed to use all possible weapons.

There were *four* chief places in Scripture which treated of marriage or of nullities in marriage. There was, first, the statement of its institution, in Genesis i. 27–28 and ii. 18, 23–24; there was the Mosaic law of divorce, Deuteronomy xxiv. 1–2; there was Christ's answer to the Pharisees, Matthew v. 31–32, with xix. 3–11; and, finally, there were the words of St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians vii. 10–16. Milton was convinced that, far from involving contradictions, these four passages, rightly understood, made perfect harmony—like the four notes plucked from the strings of the Greek lyre, the *tetrachordon*. His task, therefore, was to demonstrate this harmony by a minute examination of each of the passages, discussing the original Hebrew or Greek, interpreting, comparing, anticipating objections, replying to faulty commentary, and elaborating with appeals to both reason and human experience. He never questions the verbal inspiration of Scripture, but he insists that knowledge of God's will is not for the literal-minded; the Christian must use common sense directed by charity and reinforced with scholarship. '*No ordinance*, *human or from heaven*, *can bind against the good of man*.'

This is the major premiss of Milton's *Tetrachordon*, which, with the *Colasterion*, was published on or shortly before 4 March 1645.[111] It is a bulky pamphlet, really a book, of 110 quarto pages, eighty-four of which are devoted to exegesis, prefaced by a six-page dedication to Parliament, and followed by eighteen pages of more or less concurring testimony from other authors. In the dedication he thanks Parliament for allowing him freedom of writing, and reports that the legislators have 'done well not to repent' their wisdom in this toleration. The opinion expressed in *The Doctrine of Divorce*, they will now be shown, was an opinion also 'held by some of the best among reformed writers without scandal or confutement, though now thought new and dangerous by some of our severe gnostics, whose little reading and less meditating holds ever with hardest obstinacy that which it took up with easiest credulity'. Milton rebukes Palmer for his sermon, now 'a printed calumny', and defends himself at length against

Palmer's charges: 'I must be excused not to be so wanting to the defence of an honest name, or to the reputation of those good men who afford me their society, but to be sensible of such a foul endeavoured disgrace, not knowing aught either in mine own deserts or the laws of this land why I should be subject, in such a notorious and illegal manner, to the intemperancies of this man's preaching choler' (63–67).

There are other men, like Daniel Featley, in his *Dippers Dipt*, who 'find the ease of slighting what they cannot refute'; and Milton rebukes this Anglican preacher, then in prison, with a few scathing remarks. Still others, unnamed, cause him even more concern: those readers who praise the style of *The Doctrine of Divorce*, only to say

> that wit and parts may do much to make that seem true which is not (as was objected to Socrates by them who could not resist his efficacy, that he ever made the worse cause seem the better), and, thus thinking themselves discharged of the difficulty, love not to wade further into the fear of a convincement. These will be their excuses to decline the full examining of this serious point. . . . If this shall be the course, that what was wont to be a chief commendation and the ground of other men's confidence in an author—his diligence, his learning, his elocution—whether by right or by ill meaning granted him, shall be turned now to a disadvantage and suspicion against him, that what he writes, though unconfuted, must therefore be mistrusted, therefore not received for the industry, the exactness, the labour in it, confessed to be more than ordinary . . . why are men bred up with such care and expense to a life of perpetual studies . . . ? [70–71]

Milton is still puzzled by the different responses to his serious proposal, and he warns Parliament: 'If sound argument and reason shall be thus put off, either by an undervaluing silence, or the masterly censure of a railing word or two in the pulpit, or by rejecting the force of truth as the mere cunning of eloquence and sophistry, what can be the end of this but that all good learning and knowledge will suddenly decay?' (70). As for himself, he says again that he would far rather 'see those his detractors at any fair meeting' (64).

The exegesis in *Tetrachordon*, although largely an elaboration of points already made, is revealing of Milton's mind in many parenthetical or incidental passages. He declares it false 'that all affliction comes for sin', and insists that if human beings err, 'it is not the intent of God or man to hunt an error so to the death with a revenge beyond all measure and proportion' (77). No law, he says, forbids us to remove misery if we can. (He sounds here like his character, Manoa, in *Samson Agonistes*.) Offering a careful and provocative definition—'Marriage is a divine institution joining man and woman in a love fitly disposed to the helps and comforts of domestic life'—he uses this as the basis for argument. 'God commands not impossibilities, and all the ecclesiastical glue that liturgy or laymen can compound is not able to solder up two such incongruous natures into the one flesh of a true beseeming marriage' (98). Such a hope is as vain 'as if we undertook to weave a garment of dry sand' (97). 'Cleave to a wife—but let her be a wife, let her be a meet help, a solace, not a nothing, not an adversary, not a desertrice!'(97). This sentence, with its mention of desertion, seems closer to a direct expression of Milton's own case than anything in *The Doctrine of Divorce*. There is considerable discussion of desertion in *Tetrachordon*, but the following passage should be noticed by anyone who feels that here or elsewhere Milton is arguing from personal emotion:

> If honest and free persons may be allowed to know what is most to their own loss, the same loss and discontent but worse disquiet, with continual misery and temptation, resides in the company (or better called the *persecution*) of an unfit or an unpeaceable consort, than by his desertion. For then the deserted may enjoy himself at least. And he who deserts is more favourable to the party whom his presence afflicts than that importunate thing which is, and will be ever, conversant before the eyes a loyal and individual vexation. [204–5]

Here is Milton's own case contrasted with what he insists is a worse case, and it is precisely this worse case which he has been deploring, and offering a remedy for, in all four of his pamphlets on divorce. The passage achieves a degree of fine detachment nowhere paralleled in the *Areopagitica*.

The *Tetrachordon* makes clearer than the earlier pamphlets its author's attitude toward women. He accepts of course, as all his contemporaries accepted (including the author of the anonymous *Answer*), the biblical testimony of male superiority. There was no questioning 'the occasional end' of woman's creation, and St. Paul had explained 'that the woman is not primarily and immediately the image of God, but in reference to the man. "The head of the woman", saith he, 1 Cor. 11, "is the man; he the image and glory of God, she the glory of the man"; he not for her, but she for him. Therefore his precept is, "Wives be subject to your husbands as is fit in the Lord" . . .' (76). This was comforting orthodoxy in the seventeenth century, and none of Milton's critics would have challenged it. But the man who was a friend of Lady Margaret Hobson (and later of Lady Katherine Ranelagh) was liberal in his interpretation. Although woman is inferior to man in the hierarchy of nature, 'nevertheless man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which God proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely, as his own image and glory'. There is even another hierarchy to be recognized 'if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yield; for then a superior and more natural law comes in, that the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female' (76–77). In asserting this, Milton was extremely radical and unorthodox—not at all a man of his century. Fortunately for his reputation then, unfortunately for his reputation today, he never elaborated this dangerous heresy, which his general respect for intelligence and his particular admiration for some women of his acquaintance led him in simple logic to proclaim.

Despite the inflexible demands of exegesis upon its form, the *Tetrachordon* is in many ways reminiscent of the recently composed *Areopagitica*. Milton not only found certain philosophical truths applicable to both arguments; he used the later pamphlet for the further development and clarification of his attitudes. 'Nothing nowadays', he declares, 'is more degenerately forgotten than the true dignity of man'. As for Christian liberty: 'Just and natural privileges men neither can rightly seek, nor dare fully claim, unless they be allied to inward goodness and steadfast knowledge' (74). He contrasts again 'the outward constraint of law' with 'the inward and uncompelled actions of virtue' (137). He even tries to show that the inhumane canon law governing marriage, like the inhumane ordinance licensing books, was popish in its origins, and, moreover, productive of results quite contrary to those intended (220).

The problem of divorce, in Milton's view, was one of countless consequences of the Fall of Man. In the beginning, marriage was perfect, and 'prime Nature made us all equal, made us equal co-heirs by common right and dominion over all creatures.' But with 'the imperfection and decay of man from original righteousness', weakness and infirmity became the common heritage of humanity, and God in His wisdom not only allowed divorce, but also 'suffered His own people to waste and spoil and slay by war, to lead captives, to be, some masters, some servants, some to be princes, others to be subjects; He suffered propriety to divide all things by several possession, trade and commerce, not without usury; in His commonwealth some to be undeservedly rich, others to be undeservedly poor' (165). Thus did all human society reflect the Fall. Deny the need for divorce with charity, and 'we may as well abolish the whole law of nations, as only suffered for the same cause' (166). True, marriage is still a potential blessing:

> There is a peculiar comfort in the marriage state, besides the genial bed, which no other society affords. No mortal nature can endure either in the actions of religion or study of wisdom without sometime slackening the cords of intense thought and labour . . . We cannot, therefore, always be contemplative or pragmatical abroad, but have need of some delightful intermissions wherein the enlarged soul may leave off awhile her severe schooling and, like a glad youth in wandering vacancy, may keep her holidays to joy and harmless pastime—which, as she cannot well do without company, so in no company so well as where the different sex, in most resembling unlikeness and most unlike resemblance, cannot but please best, and be pleased in the aptitude of that variety. [85–86]

God continued the remedy of man's loneliness 'proportionably to our fallen estate', with wise provision for human weakness and error. On the other hand, man, stricter than God, has so construed God's law that, now, 'if we do but err in our choice the most unblameable error that can be, err but one minute, one moment after those mighty syllables pronounced which take upon them to join heaven and hell together unpardonably till death pardon, this divine blessing that looked but now with such a human smile upon us, and spoke such gentle reason, straight vanishes like a fair sky and brings on such a scene of cloud and tempest as turns all to shipwreck without haven or shore, but to a ransomless captivity' (90). Milton's argument is essentially the same, and in many passages the eloquence is undiminished.

The last part of the *Tetrachordon* is an impressive array of authorities, produced, Milton declares, 'without long search'. They all agree on the necessity for enlarging textual literalness in order to permit divorce for other causes besides, or equivalent to, adultery. From the primitive Christian Church he cites the testimony of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, Basil, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and three early councils. He cites similar testimony from the imperial law of the same times, and from the Greek church and civil state. Next he adduces the opinion of no fewer than twenty reformed scholars and divines, including, of course, Erasmus, Bucer, Fagius, and Grotius. Finally, he brings forward evidence to show that a committee of thirty-two eminent scholars (among them Cranmer, Peter Martyr, Walter Haddon, and Cheke) had allowed divorce and second marriage for several causes besides adultery, when they submitted to the Parliament in the last year of Edward VI a new set of ecclesiastical laws to supersede the Romish canon laws which the king had abolished. These facts, Milton explains, he had discovered since writing *The Doctrine of Divorce*, and he mentions them for the satisfaction of others, as 'unexpected witnesses to partial men' (230). They have not been his instructors in any sense, although he is happy for such support. 'If all this attain not to satisfy' his ignorant critics, he confesses that he does not know what will, for 'none of those our great controversies at this day hath had a more demonstrative explaining' (69). Henceforth, he tells Parliament,

> except new cause be given, I shall say less and less. For if the law make not timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of those consequences which her own default now more evidently produces. And if men want manliness to expostulate the right of their due ransom and to second their own occasions, they may sit hereafter and bemoan themselves to have neglected through faintness the only remedy of their sufferings, which a seasonable and well-grounded speaking might have purchased them. And perhaps, in time to come, others will know how to esteem what is not every day put into their hands . . . [72]

He is now growing weary of the controversy. The *Tetrachordon* cost him much time and much studious labour. Even while working on it he realized that the subject was 'too copious to be the matter of a dispute, or a defence, rather to be yielded, as in the best ages, a thing of common reason, not of controversy' (205). Could one man cure the dullness of an age? Or supply the want of charity? 'Thus medicining our eyes we need not doubt to see more into the meaning of these our Saviour's words than many who have gone before us' (137).

To the natural strain of study and controversy another disturbing factor was now added. It was about this time that Milton first noticed his sight growing weak and dull. Reading in the morning, as was his custom, he felt sharp pains in his eyes, and was quite unable to go on. In the evening, looking at a lamp, he saw it surrounded by a kind of rainbow. After a while he discovered that a little physical exercise made his eyes feel better, and it was not necessary to give up his work. But the awareness of what was happening troubled him, and, to make matters worse, the excessive tension of producing five pamphlets in about ten months had apparently resulted in a chronic nervous indigestion. He suffered much from flatulence. As time passed, he realized that he was slowly losing the sight of his left eye altogether. He realized that he was going blind.[112]

He was doubly alone: his wife was still far away, and he, the former friend and supporter of Smectymnuus against the bishops, now belonged to no party. He was disillusioned in humanity, uncertain about his own future. Doubtless aware of the namesake who was an officer of the London trained bands, he himself, as he later confessed, had little or no aptitude for soldiering,[113] but while he was working on *Tetrachordon*, in the closing months of 1644 (or perhaps January 1645), he had been seriously proposed as adjutant-general in the parliamentary army of Sir William Waller.[114] Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Fairfax, who had held this title, had recently been transferred to another command, and, though the facts elude us, it is likely that Hartlib and Colonel Hobson—friends of both Waller and Milton—had told Sir William that he needed, not a new aide-de-camp, but a civilian secretary-adviser and historian (such as John Rushworth was soon to become, in fact, to Lord Fairfax's army). The prospect, whatever Milton's own attitude toward the scheme, must have been exciting to his pupils; fifty years later, Edward Phillips remembered and recorded the abortive 'design in agitation'. When the 'new modelling' of the army in February and March of 1645 had forced Waller's resignation, the whole idea had been dropped.

Perhaps disappointed, perhaps relieved, Milton reconsidered what was probably another proposal of the bustling Hartlib, namely, that he accept additional pupils and make his ideal 'academy' an actuality. The nation was ravaged by war, and reaction was in the saddle, frustrating his best efforts to serve his country; but a small demonstration might succeed in a situation in which words went unheeded. He was encouraged in this notion by several applications from parents eager to have their sons receive his tutelage. He could accommodate no more, however, in his Aldersgate Street residence, and so, in the spring or summer of 1645, 'he laid out for a larger house, and soon found it out'. It was a 'great house' in the Barbican, and Phillips, remembering the ironic frustration in store for the planner, said that 'probably he might have some prospect of putting in practice his academical institution, according to the model laid down in his sheet *Of Education*.' The anonymous biographer, also recalling the 'large house', similarly reported that 'it seemed he designed in some measure to put this in practice.'[115]

It was never to be. The big, new house, when it was finally ready for occupancy, was to fulfil other purposes, and the few new pupils were soon to fade away. But we need not borrow future bitterness to complete our picture of Milton in the summer of 1645. He had no kindly thoughts of his estranged wife, or of her family; for the second year since 1643, Richard Powell had even failed to pay the interest due on that ancient loan.[116] He had no kindly thoughts of the Presbyterians, or of most of the clergy; they were teaching him how it felt to be epitomized by prejudice, to be categorized in a hostile phrase. He was treated as the spokesman for a heretical sect, the Divorcers, in the second edition of Ephraim Pagitt's *Heresiography, or a Description of the Heretics and Sectaries of These Latter Times* (1645). 'Divorcers' were those 'that would be quit of their wives for slight occasions' and would 'let loose to inordinate lust' the bonds of marriage.[117]

It was perhaps at this time, with bitter thoughts of 'the detraction which followed upon my writing certain treatises', that he returned to poetry to find some healing release for his emotions:

> I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
> By the known rules of ancient liberty,
> When straight a barbarous noise environs me
> Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs,
> As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs
> Railed at Latona's twin-born progeny,
> Which after held the sun and moon in fee.
>    But this is got by casting pearl to hogs,
> That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood
> And still revolt when Truth would set them free.
> Licence they mean when they cry Liberty;
> For who loves that must first be wise and good:
> But from that mark how far they rove we see
> For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.

The time had passed when Milton was still untainted of the people; but poetry has cleansing power; the sonnet doubtless made him feel better. It is a moving and impressive example of violent feelings curbed to fit an art form. The verses begin firmly, rise to a crescendo of raw anger, and then conclude sadly.[118]

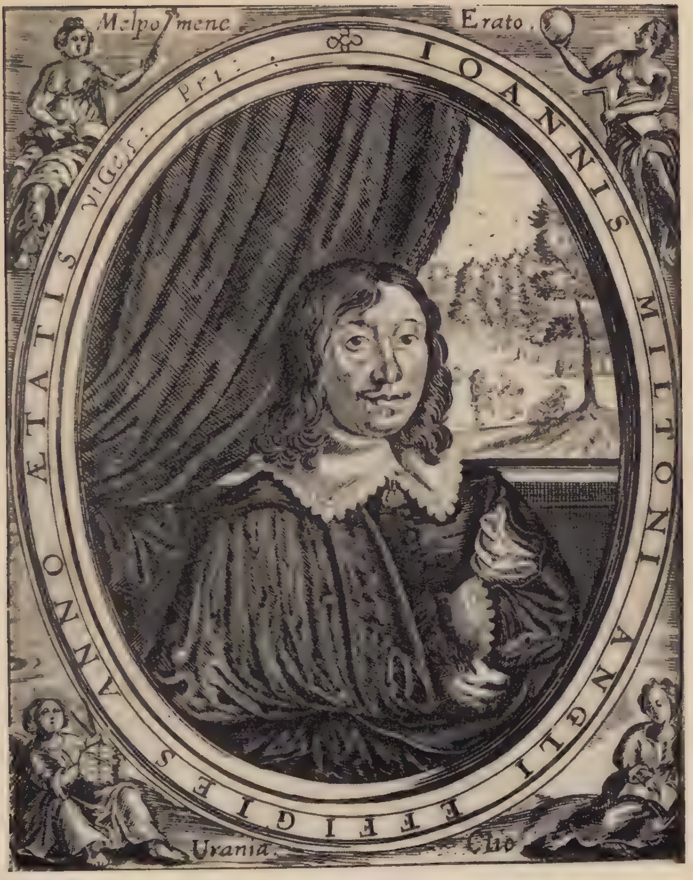
It may have been soon after the experience of composing this sonnet that Milton decided to publish his youthful poetry. The glowing promises he had made the public in *The Reason of Church Government* were still far from fulfilment, but he could offer some guarantee of good faith. Milton 'the Divorcer' was now notorious; let people discover that Milton was more than a pamphleteer, more than a controversialist; let them see him once with his singing robes about him! In 1645, when the last two divorce tracts were finished, he probably had a burning desire to appear before his detractors as a man of letters, a learned poet. When the discerning reader saw the tributes of his Italian friends and Sir Henry Wotton's praise of *Comus*, when the informed public encountered his verses in Latin and Greek and Italian as well as English, then, at last, he might be known for what he really was.

Naïve? Perhaps. In our perspective the timing was unpropitious, the motivation frantic. (He had written very little verse for five full years.) In any case, collecting his *juvenilia*, he had some interesting editorial decisions to make. It was perhaps after some reflection that he decided to include his Latin verse-letter to the Presbyterian Thomas Young, with its expressions of sympathy for an exiled Christian. He would therefore also include the youthful elegies on the two Anglican bishops, Felton and Andrewes. Despite the fact that the theatres had been closed and masquing ended, he would print both *Arcades* and *Comus*, and also his tribute to Shakespeare. Despite the fact that one of Bishop Hall's henchmen had accused him of being vomited out of the University, he would print the *Elegia Prima* to Diodati. The poems to Manso, Salzilli, and Leonora, with the epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester, would also go in, though their subjects were Roman Catholics (and the Marquess of Winchester a hated Royalist). The world of poetry was different from the world of pamphlets and partisanship. Milton was not afraid to show his true self in this other world. He would concede nothing to popular prejudice, for his fit audience would understand. He was careful to point out, however, that most of the Latin verses were composed 'before the end of his twentieth year', and to the *Elegia Septima* he appended a metrical postscript:

> These are the monuments to my idleness that in a foolish mood and with trifling purpose I once erected. Mischievous error led me astray and undisciplined youth was a bad teacher until the shady Academy [of Plato] offered its Socratic streams and freed me from the yoke to which I had submitted. At once these flames were extinct, and thenceforth my heart has been rigid with encircling ice, whence Cupid fears a frost for his arrows, and Venus herself fears my Diomedean strength.[119]

Marriage had embittered him even in regard to his adolescent verse—but not enough to prevent his publishing it.

Milton's *Poems* was registered for publication by Humphrey Moseley on 6 October 1645, having been duly licensed by the poet's neighbour, Sir Nathaniel Brent. Moseley was no ordinary bookseller; for some years he had catered to literary men, and he had recently brought out the poetry of Waller, some of which had been put to music by Henry Lawes. It was


Melpomene
Erato
Urania
Clio
IOANNIS MILTONI ANGLI EFFIGIES ANNO ÆTATIS VIGes: Pri:

The Marshall 'Portrait', 1645

Moseley who insisted that Milton employ an engraver, so that the forthcoming volume might be graced with a portrait. Because the country was still at war, good engravers were none too plentiful, and Milton was forced to place himself at the mercy of one William Marshall, who seemed safe enough, having done the portraits for editions of Bacon, Donne, Fuller, the Earl of Stirling, and Shakespeare (the last-named in the *Poems* of 1640, which had reprinted Milton's own tribute).[120]

But the portrait which Marshall finally produced was such as to make a man even of inhuman modesty recoil. 'Portrait of John Milton, Englishman, in his twenty-first year'—thus reads the Latin legend around the oval. It bears not the remotest resemblance to the painting done when Milton was about twenty-one. The face is that of a sour old fellow with a double chin and pockets under his eyes, looking exceedingly silly and trying to hide what might be a withered arm. Although we do not know exactly what happened when Milton saw this work of art, there was clearly some delay in publication. The sequel is amusing—and revealing. It was undignified, perhaps, to make a fuss over an unflattering portrait, but one cruel joke might be countered with another. Milton asked Mr. Marshall—who obviously knew no Greek—to engrave a few lines of Greek verse underneath the portrait. Very painstakingly Mr. Marshall complied, and with his own hands wrote (in effect) for the amusement of Milton's learned acquaintances and a crib-nurtured posterity:

> You, who really know my face,
> Fail to find me in this place.
> Portraiture the fool pretends;
> Laugh at the result, my friends.

A crude, Samson-like jest, perhaps, but in the same mood that had produced such titles as *Areopagitica*, *Colasterion*, and *Tetrachordon*—and would soon produce a disdainful sonnet on the last-named. Milton Agonistes, at thirty-seven, was in the age of irony, and grateful for his knowledge of Greek. He had need of irony—and of something more. His collected *Poems* were to attract almost no public attention, favourable or otherwise. There were three editions of Edmund Waller's poetry in 1645, but John Milton's first edition was still being offered for sale fifteen years later.[121]

# 9. Reconciliation, 1645–1648

FROM March of 1645 until February of 1649 Milton published no more prose. The interval belonged to poetry, to further study, and, near its close, to some writing of history. The mood in which it was begun is suggested by the publication, at the very close of 1645, of *Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, Compos'd at several times*, with its title-page motto from Virgil's *Eclogues*: 'Crown my brow with ivy, and let no hostile tongue do injury to the destined poet.'[1] Significantly, it was the second time he had taken a motto from this early work of a great epic poet. He was serving notice that his readers would encounter the immature products of a bard to be, one whose mind was set on far greater things. Controversies raged; the pamphlet wars continued; burning issues were being decided—issues to which Milton was far from indifferent. But the man who had printed eleven separate tracts within the feverish space of four years sat back now as a spectator and watched history being made. The next four years belonged to him, not to an ungrateful country. He had tried being a good citizen and, thoroughly disillusioned by his several attempts at reform, he returned to the contemplative life.

There were no more full-length replies to *The Doctrine of Divorce*; there were no replies at all to the other three divorce tracts; but the author of these daring pamphlets was never allowed to forget their futility. He was assumed to be an Independent in Robert Baillie's *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time*, published on or before 24 November 1645, and reprinted two months later. Baillie, one of the Scottish leaders of the Assembly, wrote: 'Concerning divorces, some of them go far beyond any of the Brownists, not to speak of Mr. Milton, who in a large treatise hath pleaded for a full liberty for any man to put away his wife whenever he pleaseth, without any fault in her at all, but for any dislike or dyspathy of humour . . .' A marginal note repeated the misreading: 'Mr. Milton permits any man to put away his wife upon his mere pleasure, without fault and without the cognisance of any judge.'[2] In February 1646 the licenser of a new work felt it necessary to disavow any past connexion with such 'dangerous books', meeting with 'harshest censure', as the *Bloudy Tenent* and the treatise about *Divorce*.[3] In the first part of another book, Thomas Edwards's *Gangræna: or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours*, *Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time*, published on or before 26 February 1646, 'Milton's doctrine of divorce' was thus summarized: 'That 'tis lawful for a man to put away his wife upon indisposition, unfitness or contrariety of mind arising from a cause in nature unchangeable, and for disproportion and deadness of spirit, or something distasteful and averse in the immutable bent of name [nature]; and man in regard of the freedom and eminency of his creation is a law to himself in this matter, being head of the other sex, which was made for him, neither need he hear any judge therein above himself.'[4]

In the second part of the *Gangræna*, published on or before 28 May 1646, Edwards illustrated the pernicious results of the loose doctrine he had earlier summarized:

> There are two gentlemen of the Inns of Court, civil and well disposed men, who out of novelty went to hear the women preach; and after Mistress Attaway, the lace-woman, had finished her exercise, these two gentlemen had some discourse with her, and among other passages she spake to them of Master Milton's *Doctrine of Divorce*, and asked them what they thought of it, saying it was a point to be considered of, and that she for her part would look more into it, for she had an unsanctified husband that did not walk in the way of Sion nor speak the language of Canaan. And how accordingly she hath practised it, in running away with another woman's husband, is now sufficiently known to Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Saltmarsh . . .[5]

With the ostensible blessing of Milton, but doubtless to his private horror ('Licence they mean when they cry liberty'), Mrs. Attaway, the she-preacher of Coleman Street, eloped with a William Jenney, proving not only the power of the printed word but also the boon of Christian liberty to over-amorous Baptists.

As the crowded years went by, men who knew nothing of John Milton heard rumours about a sect of Divorcers and solemnly listed this heresy in their catalogues. Men who later were quarrelling with Milton on quite different grounds continued to taunt him with his views of marriage. A Royalist poetaster, Christopher Wasse, coined a phrase, 'the froward Miltonist'. After 1645 no more editions of the tractate were called for, however; the times were exciting, and new sensations captured the popular interest. The doctrine of 'divorce at pleasure' soon became a half-remembered, half-legendary heresy of the age. It was recalled when *Little Non-such*, with its wild words on matrimony, created a momentary stir in 1646; it was recalled, sometimes, when Presbyterians warned anew against the dangers of toleration. But if one may judge from its publishing history and from contemporary allusions, it was quickly forgotten by most of the reading public. After 1646, if anyone were seriously interested in the problems of divorce, he could find three tracts by 'M. Milton' listed, without comment, in the second edition of a bibliography of works on various phases of religion.[6] In 1646, moreover, there was the *Uxor Ebraica* of the learned, highly respected John Selden to cope with, a work of scholarship dwarfing the urgent pamphlets of a John Milton.

To the zealous student and literary stylist who had hoped to effect a great reform and also to engage in a great controversy, all this constituted a crushing disappointment, although he paid generous tribute to Selden's 'copious elucidation' in his later writing.[7] *The Judgement of Martin Bucer*, his trump card, tardily but triumphantly produced, was for some mysterious reason completely ignored. Nothing happened as he had hoped and expected. In the silence of singularity had he spoken, perhaps, more loudly than was necessary? In his nervousness, had he sung out of key? Publishing the anti-episcopal tracts he had added his fresh and anonymous voice to a rising chorus, but in *The Doctrine of Divorce* he had stepped forward upon the stage for an unscheduled solo. The response of the audience had surprised, then hurt, then angered him. Retiring to the wings he had shaken a threatening fist at his tormentors. When he was alone, he felt suddenly sick.

This experience, however disappointing or empty of practical consequence, brought Milton to a new stage in his intellectual development. He had made a first trial at the formulation of basic principles later to be matured and embodied in his noblest verse. He had withdrawn irrevocably from the central Puritan position, and had moved, informally, toward the apparent shelter of the nonconformist 'left wing'. Realizing that reformation would not be sudden, as he had once thought it might, he had revised his ideas on the nature of a desirable reformation. The frigid scrupulosity of the Puritan ethic was now abhorrent to him; he was ready to demand greater, and still greater liberties in terms of the needs of human nature. 'No ordinance, human or from heaven,' he had written, 'can bind against the good of man.' This revolutionary principle, once pronounced, proved awkward to circumscribe; and having condemned both licensing of books and the canon law of marriage as denials of the privileges of the individual Christian, he was prepared to follow his own logic fearlessly. If the free conscience was a sufficient judge of the legitimacy of a divorce, it was a sufficient judge in other matters involving the legitimate claims of nature. Free reasoning was not inconsistent with the divine will, for it could recover lost truth and discover new. The end of perfect reformation, therefore, was Christian liberty guaranteed to all good men, the removal of all impediments to the vital development of virtue. God's own ordinances, Milton believed, operated in charitable cognizance of human weakness. Human ordinances should not outface God with severity.

It had not, of course, been Milton's purpose to evolve and clearly enunciate a philosophy. His views, hammered out on the forge of Presbyterian opposition, had resulted from the need to fortify a position already taken. True, the process of defence involved more logical thinking than the anti-prelatical argument had demanded of him, and the divorce tracts are, in a sense, more philosophical than any of the earlier pamphlets. But there is still more *feeling* than philosophy. That is why Milton's writings of 1643–5 contain his most eloquent pleas for human liberty. That is also why he needed leisure, and time, to explore the still uncharted seas of broad conviction.

It was in 1645 or 1646 that he began the compilation of his own 'Perfect System of Divinity', his much-needed personal guide to the more difficult and subtle points of theology. The method, later to be abandoned in favour of another, was simple: he studied the works of 'the ablest of divines who had written of that subject' (for example, the *Medulla Theologiæ* of William Ames and the *Compendium Theologiæ Christianæ* of John Wolleb), presumably marked those passages with which he agreed or which inspired disagreement, and then dictated his own interpretations to Edward Phillips and some of the other students. This method not only insured coherence in collecting data, and provided some relief for his aching eyes; it fitted coherently into the curriculum he had designed and had advertised in June 1644. The Phillips boys were now ready for Hebrew and the study of theology. The regular Sunday readings from chapters of the Greek Testament had been completed. Edward's later account of his education helps us to date with some precision this significant undertaking.[8]

Milton's own later remarks throw additional light on the beginning of his theological index, and on its subsequent development into a more independent and more ambitious work, based almost solely on the Bible. The preface to his *De Doctrina Christiana* suggests strongly that the treatise was written in at least two stages. Preliminary to the first stage was, of course, his study of the Bible in his youth ('*Adolescens*'), when, in imitation of 'a few of the shorter [*sic*] systems of divines', he collected passages of Scripture 'under certain heads'. These early notes have not survived. Also preliminary was his subsequent reading ('*deinde*') in 'some of the more copious theological treatises', which disappointed and disturbed him. Notes taken in this period almost certainly filled the lost 'Theological Index' of the Commonplace Book, cross references to which occur among the surviving sections. His disappointment was often made explicit in his anti-prelatical tracts. He resolved, therefore, to compile his own 'methodical tractate of Christian doctrine', derived from the Bible. This is the first stage, which we have now reached. But, he goes on to say, 'after a diligent perseverance in this plan' for several years ('*per aliquot annos*'), he perceived that 'the strongholds of the reformed religion', although sufficiently fortified against the papists, were 'in many other quarters' (i.e., Protestant) 'neither competently strengthened with works of defence, nor adequately provided with champions' ('*propugnatoribus*'). He concluded that religious truth requires 'an unwearied search': '*more than I was aware of still remained*, which required to be *more rigidly examined by the rule of*

*Scripture* and reformed after a *more accurate model*' (italics added). It was to be after reaching these conclusions—and after 1655—that he would finally prosecute his plan to his personal satisfaction, and to the benefit of his long-delayed epic poem.[9]

It is barely a half-truth to say that Milton postponed writing his epic because of his pamphleteering and his interest in politics. As we shall see, when he finally began it, he abandoned neither of these things. This is part of the wonder of the beginning. The decision to begin was never a question of too many distractions, or of lack of leisure, as an ordinary man might suppose (and ordinary men have supposed). The basic reason for the delay was his recognized lack of a fully coherent body of convictions on matters with which, he knew, a Christian epic would inevitably be concerned.

It is significant that, despite their subject-matter, there is very little *theology* in the anti-prelatical tracts of 1641–2. As we have seen, the problem of divorce compelled him to examine the details of Christian doctrine, and we saw the changing emphasis of his thought reflected in *Areopagitica* and *Tetrachordon*. If one concentrates upon only a few aspects of Christian liberty, one may easily see in these pamphlets a kind of preliminary sketch of the philosophy of *Paradise Lost*; but if one reads more closely, it is apparent that Milton himself was finding painful proof of his own infirmity—of his own intellectual uncertainty. It is significant again that in his political writings of 1649–55 we shall discover extremely few doctrinal arguments (or condemnations of heresy); indeed, appeals to first principles will become progressively fewer in each successive work. And his *Samson Agonistes*—whenever it was composed—is starkly devoid of theology. We shall have to wait until we come to the pamphlets of 1659 before we find Milton writing with genuine assurance about his doctrinal position. By this time, the *De Doctrina Christiana* has been written, and the epic finally begun.

Meanwhile, certain *kinds* of composition, both in poetry and in prose, might safely be undertaken, works not involving any system of convictions in the making. In prose, there was the immediate desirability of producing certain new, improved textbooks (in logic and in Latin grammar, for example). And the Latin thesaurus he would continue to compile as his studies managed to contribute. As for poetry, apart from occasional pieces, the problem now was to find a form and a subject that would make few, if any, demands upon Christian theology.

Although we cannot be certain of the date, it was very probably about this time that Milton did compose his simplified Latin grammar, intended as a substitute for the grammars of Lily, Farnaby, and others, all of which in his judgement prolonged unduly the process of language learning.[10] He insisted—and he had proved—that a working knowledge of a foreign language could be acquired in one year instead of the usual seven. His own book, therefore, was brief (only seventy-five pages of text when eventually published as a pocket-sized duodecimo); moreover, it was in English, and, unlike other such books, it combined the explanations of inflection (accidence) and of syntax. It was characteristic of Milton thus to compete with a famous pedagogical classic; as the 'authorized' grammar, Lily's had dominated the field for almost a hundred years. However, while producing a text only one-quarter as long, Milton borrowed much from his predecessor; sometimes the wording is almost identical, and about 330 of some 530 Latin quotations were evidently taken directly from Lily. There is evidence that Milton also consulted, and to a lesser extent borrowed from, five or six other grammars. It has been estimated that he contributed about 175 quotations from classical authors that are not to be found in these earlier textbooks; his illustrative quotations, not incidentally, may teach good manners and virtuous behaviour, or rebuke the unresponsive pupil, or convey worldly wisdom or some bit of useful information. (This device Hartlib doubtless approved.) The Latin author most often drawn upon for such phrases was Cicero, who is also conspicuous in the latter part of the Miltonic curriculum as outlined in *Of Education*.

Hoping to discover Milton's interests and activities in this period, one turns with high expectation to the notes in his Commonplace Book for clues—and one is utterly baffled. As we saw, the notes for 1635–8 clearly indicated a coherent programme of study in Church history; those for 1639–41 indicated an equally coherent programme of study in British history; and those for 1642–5 showed him deeply concerned with modern European history and law. However, if we have correctly assigned all these entries to periods before 1646, there are no remaining notes in Milton's handwriting except for one sure and several possible items.[11] The only extensive composition which we can be certain belongs to this period is the beginning of his *History of Britain*, which reflects reading undertaken in 1639–41. Moreover, the Commonplace Book was *not* abandoned; it contains entries by at least seven different amanuenses, all presumably made after Milton's blindness and chiefly reflecting, as one would expect, his interest in good government. What are we to make of the fact that the Commonplace Book—so revealing a key to Milton's interests earlier and later, in periods of leisure and in periods of active composition—contains almost no entries made during the three years 1646–8?

Although other notebooks may have been started or brought into use (as must have been the case when he wrote the divorce tracts), is it not reasonable to infer that Milton spent most of this period in composition? Theodore Haak told Hartlib what he was doing in 1648: 'Milton is not only writing a Vniv. History of Engl. but also an Epitome of all Purchas Volumes.'[12] Milton himself said that four books of his *History* were completed before mid-March 1649,[13] but neither he nor any of his early biographers spoke of the epitome of Purchas, which must have been abortive.[14]

These projects reflect, however, the 1639–41 reading programme (not the notes taken) in British history and the 1642–5 programme in European and world history. They also account for the year 1648. But *before* he decided to capitalize on all his reading in history, what was he doing? Although he probably continued work on his 'System of Divinity', his writing of three or four sonnets and two other poems in the years 1646–7 suggest that he also employed this long-awaited leisure in what he had wanted to do all along, and had promised readers would be soon forthcoming—the composition of a major poem.[15]

In all probability he decided to get on with a dramatic poem. When he began a tragedy on 'Paradise Lost' about 1642, he did so, we must suppose, not because the dramatic form appealed to him more than the epic, nor because he had abandoned all idea of writing an epic, but rather because there were practical objections to continuing an ambitious 'Arthuriad'. For one thing, in such eventful and distracting times a play could be brought to completion with far less difficulty than a much longer poem. For another, he had grown to distrust the monkish chroniclers and to doubt the validity of the Arthurian story. Moreover, he had already enjoyed a successful experience in the dramatic form, with *Comus*. Epic was a new and awesome territory, to be explored later. Having, therefore, promised the knowing reader early in 1642 a literary achievement within 'some few years', he not surprisingly took the nearest, most promising way. This consideration was, of course, equally pertinent in 1645.

There is even a curious piece of evidence to suggest that it still obtained. In the four corners of Marshall's alleged portrait of Milton, published with the 1645 *Poems*, are representations of four Muses. Three of these are so clearly appropriate that they argue Milton's own voice in the selection. There is Erato, who symbolizes the lyric verse in the volume; there are Clio and Urania to symbolize the interest in history and natural science reflected in both *Of Education* and Milton's private studies. But the fourth Muse is neither Thalia nor Polyhymnia, both of whom are active in the *Poems*; and she is not Calliope, the spirit of epic. She is Melpomene, Muse of tragedy.

If Milton began any writing between the publication of *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, early in March 1645, and the publication of the *Poems* at the very close of the year, there were a number of intruding interests and interruptions. First, as we have observed, was the necessity for finding a larger house. Having been asked by several other people to undertake the education of their sons, he had determined to open a small but select academy, perhaps with a view to experimenting further with his theories as sketched in *Of Education*. One of the new pupils was Thomas Gardiner of Essex, a youth of about seventeen.[16] Another was fifteen-year-old Richard Barry, second Earl of Barrymore since the death of his father, David Barry, three years before.[17] Young Barry was entrusted to Milton's care by his aunt, Lady Katherine Ranelagh, wife of Arthur Jones, second Viscount Ranelagh in the Irish peerage.[18] There were other pupils, though Phillips recalled that 'the accession of scholars was not great'.[19] The larger house was soon found. It was not far from the pretty garden-house in Aldersgate Street—a little more removed from the city to the north, in one of the streets opening off Aldersgate Street, called Barbican. Nearby was the town mansion of the Earl of Bridgewater.[20]

Lady Ranelagh, a wise and charming woman of thirty in 1645, soon became, if she was not already, one of Milton's most respected friends. She was the daughter of the late Sir Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, who had died in 1643 after many years as a leading Irish statesman. In 1656 Milton was to speak of her as one who had been as close to him as a near relative.[21] In 1645 she was but one of several women whose society he was enjoying. We have already noticed his friendship with Lady Margaret Hobson; another friend, of humbler station, was Mrs. Katharine Thomason, wife of the bookseller George Thomason, an intelligent and well-read woman whose company he found stimulating.[22] He was also in the habit of dropping in to see his relatives, William and Hester Blackborough, who lived a little south of him, in St. Martin's-le-Grand Lane, within Aldersgate. He passed their house on his way to any business in the city, and he enjoyed talking with them. Mrs. Blackborough was the daughter of Richard Jeffrey, of Little Burstead, Essex, who was a nephew of Paul Jeffrey, Milton's grandfather. William Blackborough, a leather seller by trade, was in poor health in 1645; he made his will on 11 April (Milton was a witness), and had only a year or so to live. He and Hester had been married for twenty-six years, and they were eager to see Milton and his wife reconciled, if it could somehow be managed.[23]

Their kindly interest in Milton's happiness was complicated by another friendship which he was cultivating in this period. He had formed an attachment for one of the daughters of a Dr. Davis, remembered by Edward Phillips as 'a very handsome and witty gentlewoman'. It was rumoured—and Phillips, aged about fourteen, heard the talk—that Milton, thoroughly persuaded of his Christian right to give his wife a bill of divorcement in Mosaic fashion, law or no law, had proposed marriage to Miss Davis. Miss Davis, it was said, was averse 'to this motion', although, if she was fond of Milton, she must have found him difficult to dissuade.[24]

Alas, the facts elude us. Perhaps the gossip about Miss Davis was without foundation, and Milton was simply enjoying the society of a pretty, clever woman. Perhaps, on the other hand, he went so far in acting upon his convictions as to send Mary a letter declaring her to be divorced. Whatever happened, whatever the provocation, the Blackboroughs and other friends decided to take a hand. Mary returned to London, and the Blackboroughs welcomed her to their home, hoping for the best. The next time

Milton called upon his relatives, he was invited inside, a door was opened, and there, in another room, was a person he had never expected to meet again, a face he had not seen in three tortured years, a face he had once found lovely. . . .

Without love, Milton had noted in his Commonplace Book during Mary's absence, copulation is 'cold, unpleasant, unfruitful, harmful, bestial, abominable'.[25] Without love, he had said in print, 'matrimony hath no true being, no good, no solace, nothing of God's instituting, nothing but so sordid and so low as to be disdained of any generous person'. These words occur in the recently composed *Tetrachordon* (128), where he had also written:

> When love finds itself utterly unmatched and justly vanishes, nay, rather cannot but vanish, the fleshly act indeed may continue, but not holy, not pure, not beseeming the sacred bond of marriage, being at best but an animal excretion, but more truly worse and more ignoble than that mute kindliness among the herds and flocks, in that proceeding as it ought from intellective principles, it participates of nothing rational, but that which the field and fold equals. For in human actions the soul is the agent, the body in a manner passive. If, then, the body do out of sensitive force what the soul complies not with, how can man, but not rather something beneath man, be thought the doer? [101–2]

When love vanishes, 'any generous person' will disdain continued intimacy, and will seek divorce. But Christ had taught 'that divorce is not rashly to be made, but reconcilement to be persuaded and endeavoured'.

Mary was now almost twenty-one; Milton was almost thirty-seven. What had the poet seen in her that had prompted him to so impulsive a marriage? Such beauty as she had, such freshness and youthful vitality, must now, between seventeen and twenty, have flowered most perceptibly. She told him that she had returned of her own accord. She told him that her mother had incited her to her stubborn and perverse behaviour. She confessed her fault and begged his pardon, his forgiveness.[26]

Milton hated tyranny; he hated ignorance, and hypocrisy, and laziness; he could tremble with emotion and pour forth rhythmic rancour upon an idea that threatened the free growth of the human spirit. But it was not in his nature to hate *people*. Above all things he hated Roman Catholicism in the abstract; but he liked many Roman Catholics. Faced with a flesh-and-blood relationship he was quick to sympathize, charitable in his attitude, generous with understanding. He had a talent for friendship. It is important for us to remember these facts if we would not misinterpret what happened in the house of William and Hester Blackborough, behind a door most rightly closed to us. We have no right or reason to doubt the conclusions of Milton's earliest biographers. Said Edward Phillips: 'Partly his own generous nature, more inclinable to reconciliation than to perseverance in anger and revenge, and partly the strong intercession of friends on both sides, soon brought him to an "Act of Oblivion" and a firm League of Peace for the future.' Of his gentleness and humanity, the anonymous biographer declared, he 'gave signal proof in receiving home and living in good accord till her death with his first wife, after she had so obstinately absented from him'.[27]

It would seem that Milton, realizing that he still loved Mary, immediately showed consideration for her feelings: he did not ask her to come back to the unhappy house which she had deserted three years before, and in which he had spent so many lonely hours. The big house in Barbican would soon be ready, and there, in new surroundings, their marriage could have a fresh start. Meanwhile, a room was found for her in the home of the widow Webber, Christopher's mother-in-law, in St. Clement's Churchyard. Mrs. Webber and Christopher's wife, we may feel certain, had conspired with the Blackboroughs and other friends to bring about the reconciliation.[28] (If Miss Davis was wise as well as witty, perhaps she too gave Milton sound advice. We hear no more of her.)

By October of 1645, or perhaps a little earlier, the Barbican house was in readiness, and the move was made. John and Mary, John's father, now eighty-two, the Phillips boys, the other pupils old and new, all settled into the new house—'his great house', Edward Phillips called it. On 6 October the volume of Milton's *Poems* was registered by Moseley for publication. There was proof-reading to be done on more than two hundred pages of verse.[29] Mary was quickly reminded that she was married to an author and scholar.

It was a time for planning, for looking forward. The war had gone well for Parliament in 1645, and there were grounds for hoping that the bloodshed might soon end. On 15 February the efficiency of the army had been improved by an ordinance for New Modelling, and on 3 April a Self-Denying Ordinance had promised to rid the military of politics, all Members of Parliament being excluded from holding commands. The popular Sir Thomas Fairfax had been appointed commander-in-chief in place of Essex. Before the time had come for Cromwell to resign his post, he had taken his force into Oxfordshire, then wholly in the King's possession, and at Islip Bridge on 24 April had utterly routed a Royalist army. By special order he had then been asked to continue his command for a time as Lieutenant-General under Fairfax, who, between 22 May and 5 June, laid unsuccessful siege to Oxford. The siege had been raised in order that the New Model army might meet the main Royalist force at Naseby, on 14 June. This great battle, besides adding to Cromwell's fame as a military genius, had proved most disastrous to the royal cause; it had been, in fact, the beginning of a long series of defeats for the King, who had fled with the remnants of his army into Wales. Bristol had been successfully stormed on 10 September, after its garrison had been reinforced by Prince Rupert. Even the amazing success of the Royalist

Montrose in Scotland—which Parliament had recognized by appointing 5 September a day of public fast and prayer—had finally been ended on 13 September when David Leslie defeated the Scots at Philiphaugh. From 5 November the King had taken up his winter headquarters again at Oxford, but it was by then clear that the end would be only a matter of time.

The course of military history had affected Milton directly in several ways. The battle of Naseby, on 14 June, had made possible his wife's safe journey between Oxford and London, if it had not also convinced her Royalist parents that the King's cause was doubtful of success. Six days after Naseby, John Rouse, librarian at Oxford, was being sent copies of Milton's *Areopagitica* and *The Doctrine of Divorce* for the Bodleian.[30] After October, to be sure, communication between Oxford and London was again cut off, and Mary must have worried about her family, who had deserted their home at Forest Hill and were living in Oxford under the royal protection. During the winter of waiting, Milton himself must have wondered at times about the safety of his brother Christopher, now in Exeter and still active as a royal commissioner of sequestrations.[31]

Despite all occasions for anxiety, in the first half of 1646 life took on new meaning for both Milton and his young wife. Mary was with child. There were new students to be led down the delightful paths of virtuous education. The volume of *Poems*, published not long before 2 January, was finding its first readers. Even the shadow of approaching blindness did not seem too ominous, although Milton's eyes continued to give him trouble.

He was still sad about the unfortunate response to his divorce tracts, but after Mary's return his anger and indignation had softened to a feeling of amused contempt for the stupidity of the reading public. He had deliberately given Greek titles to his last three pamphlets, and now he was not surprised to observe how learning had lost him an audience. (How was he to know that, four years later, another book with a Greek title, the *Eikon Basilike*, would become one of the greatest best-sellers of his century?) In a light and humorous sonnet, probably written soon after the publication of his *Poems*,[32] he entertained himself and his friends with reflections on contemporary taste in titles:

> A book was writ of late called *Tetrachordon*,
> And woven close, both matter, form, and style;
> The subject new, it walked the town awhile
> Numbering good intellects—now seldom pored on.
> Cries the stall-reader, 'Bless us! what a word on
> A title page is this!' and some in file
> Stand spelling false while one might walk to Mile-
> End-Green. . . .

The informal riming in this sonnet was something new in Milton's practice, as was the introduction of the language of everyday life. He was feeling better about the whole affair, inclined to make a joke of it. His mood was that of the Greek epigram in which he had punished Marshall for doing an incredibly bad portrait, even while accepting the consequences. He had learned that irony helps to absorb the shock of misfortune. It was ironical, certainly, that the same readers who balked at his nice Greek title were now, thanks to the invasion of Scottish Presbyterianism, having to accustom themselves to northern names even less smooth:

> Why is it harder, sirs, than Gordon,
> Colkitto, or Macdonnell, or Galasp?
> Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek
> That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.

Thinking of his former friends, the Presbyterians, Milton could get really angry. They had not only branded him a heretic—that was their ignorance! But they were also threatening all freedom of conscience. He had helped them to rid the country of prelacy; he had helped them to overthrow the civil power of the bishops, the prescribed liturgy, the hateful hierarchy, the vicious practice of one person holding several benefices ('plurality'). And with what result? As he saw it, he had aided in substituting one evil for another. He expressed his attitude toward the power-seeking Presbyterians in a poem that began as a sonnet but spilled over into what the Italians called a *sonetto caudato*, a sonnet with a tail:[33]

> Because you have thrown off your prelate lord,
> And with stiff vows renounced his liturgy
> To seize the widowed whore, Plurality,
> From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred,
> Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
> To force our consciences that Christ set free,
> And ride us with a *classic* hierarchy
> Taught ye by mere A. S. and Rutherford?

The use of names and initials gave this poem an informal tone like the one on *Tetrachordon*, but Milton was not, in this, merely amused. He had not forgotten that Prynne, Featley, Pagitt, Edwards, and the Scotsman, Baillie, had condemned him in print as a heretic:

> Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent
> Would have been held in high esteem with Paul
> Must now be named and printed heretics
> By shallow Edwards and Scotch what-d'ye-call.
> But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
> Your plots and packing worse than those of Trent,
> That so the Parlament
> May with their wholesome and preventive shears
> Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears,
> And succour our just fears,
> When they shall read this clearly in your charge:
> *New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large.*

He prophesies no two-handed engine at the door, and even hopes that there will be no physical punishment such as Laud had inflicted on William Prynne. He is weary of violence and bloodshed. But hypocrisy and the tyrannous forcing of free conscience must be cut off by the wholesome shears of wise government. He still has faith in Parliament.

The publication of Milton's *Poems* at the close of 1645 doubtless spurred him to this additional verse-making. Certainly his mind was again upon poetry. There were presentation copies of the book to be distributed,[34] and appropriate inscriptions to be written—one of the most important, the inscription to Henry Lawes, whose name had appeared on the title page of the volume. What should he say to Lawes, who had composed the music for the songs of *Arcades* and *Comus*, who had even published the masque, and who had now lent his prestige to the collected *Poems*? Like his brother William, who had recently been killed at the siege of Chester, Henry Lawes had remained loyal to his master, King Charles, but he was also a valued personal friend of Milton—indeed, a friend to English poetry. Royalist or not, he stood apart from the throng whose political sympathies were right but whose worth and talent were nothing. Milton wrote for him, therefore, a sonnet eloquent in praise and gratitude:

> Harry, whose tuneful and well measured song
> First taught our English music how to span
> Words with just note and accent, not to scan
> With Midas ears, committing short and long,
> Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
> With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
> To after age thou shalt be writ the man
> That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.

Milton did not put his compliment in personal terms, but thanked his old friend, Harry, in the name of English poetry:

> Thou honourest verse, and verse must lend her wing
> To honour thee, the priest of Phoebus' choir.

The music of Lawes was not only beyond politics; it even inspired Milton to use the word 'priest' again without disgust and cynicism.

His praise of Lawes, whose music respected the poet's rhythms and meaning, was, by implication, a criticism of other musicians, particularly the madrigalists (including Milton's own father, dare we add?). The sonnet is notable in another respect: it contains an allusion to a specific poem by a contemporary, William Cartwright's *Ariadne Deserted by Theseus*. These 'happiest lines', which Lawes had set and which Milton evidently admired, are a very early example of the kind of long irregular stanzas which Abraham Cowley was later to popularize as 'Pindaric'. Their fascination for the author of *On Time*, *At a Solemn Music*, and *Lycidas* is perhaps obvious, but they represent a distinct step beyond Milton's experiments in their irregularity—a step we shall soon find Milton himself taking, in his own way.

The sonnet to Lawes was composed on 9 February 1646.[35] A little more than two months later, another long-absent one returned to London. Exeter had surrendered to the everywhere-victorious army of Parliament, and on 20 April Christopher Milton was not only back with his wife and children but also taking the Covenant before William Barton, minister of St. John Zachary, in Aldersgate ward. His work for the King was ended, and all his personal belongings had been seized by the state. The only real estate he owned, a house called the Cross Keys in St. Martin's parish, Ludgate, had of course been sequestered by the government. As a 'delinquent' he had the privilege of compounding for this property under the law, paying an appropriate fine, and he petitioned to do so on 7 August. Meanwhile, he and his family doubtless found shelter under the roof of the widow Webber, unless some of them had to be accommodated in the big house in Barbican. His nephew Edward Phillips wrote later: 'When the war was ended with victory and success to the Parliament party . . . and his composition made by the help of his brother's interest with the then prevailing power, he betook himself again to his former study and profession, following chamber-practice every term, yet came to no advancement in the world in a long time, except some small employ in the town of Ipswich'.[36] But this is to anticipate. For the present, Christopher and his wife were reunited in London, and on 2 February 1647 their son Thomas was baptized in the parish church of his mother-in-law.[37]

Throughout May 1646 Oxford was again under siege. The army commanded by Fairfax was in possession of the surrounding country, including Forest Hill and the Powell manor, but the Powell family were within the besieged city, undergoing its dangers. King Charles had left his headquarters in disguise shortly before the attack had begun, and on 5 May he reappeared in Newark, placing himself under the protection of the Scottish army garrisoned there. He was safe, but the people in Oxford were not. The siege continued into June, and Mrs. Mary Milton, expecting her baby within two months, worried, no doubt, about the welfare of her family.

On Wednesday, 29 July (a fast day), at about half past six in the evening, Milton's first child was born.[38] She was named Anne, and her grandmother, who had been Anne Moulton, was with her twenty-one-year-old daughter when the critical hour came. Oxford had surrendered on 24 June, and, three days later, Richard Powell had received a pass from Fairfax which permitted him 'to repair unto London or elsewhere upon his necessary occasions' and to enjoy the full benefits of the articles of surrender. He and his family had hurried to London, of course. Five of the Powell children—George, Archdale, William, and the two Elizabeths—were still under sixteen years of age, and doubtless accompanied their parents. There may have been others. They were all homeless as a result of the parliamentarian victory, and Milton, the once-hated parliamentarian, proved himself truly magnanimous: he invited them to share his commodious new quarters in Barbican.[39]

From the first of July 1646, one supposes, literary activity in the Milton household was temporarily suspended, and political differences were forgotten in the stir and flurry of parenthood. Education was abruptly dispossessed by the homeless Powells and the unusual demands of domesticity. Some of the pupils had to be dismissed; young Thomas Gardiner, for example, was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, on 11 July. Even Edward Phillips, who had lived with his uncle for six long years, seems to have left him at this time.[40] Milton's own education had entered a new phase, which handled roughly the habits and routines developed in thirty-seven studious years. The house was noisy and there was no relief from the constant bustle except to go away. The baby was first the focal point of all commotion, and then, after a few exhausting months had passed, Mr. Powell became ill. It is easy to imagine that the management of the household slipped into the strong hands of Mary's mother, for whom it was no novelty to live with a dozen people under one roof. In the midst of the confusion, emerging occasionally from his room to have a look at his latest granddaughter, Milton's father sought the peace which his eighty-odd years had earned.

The retired scrivener could still read without spectacles. His son, on the other hand, was having more and more trouble with his eyes, particularly with his left eye. Reading was becoming painful, and his viscera continued out of sorts. He tried a variety of medicines in an effort to relieve the strain on his eyes, but none of them seemed to help unless, perhaps, temporarily. In his letter to Hartlib, *Of Education*, he had expressed the conviction that educated people should know 'the tempers, the humours, the seasons, and how to manage a crudity, which he who can wisely and timely do is . . . a great physician to himself and to his friends'. Now he was applying his own theory, 'perpetually tampering with physic' in the hope of preserving his sight. He suffered often from headache.[41]

Composition was difficult during this period, yet after the burial of Mrs. Katharine Thomason, on 12 December 1646, Milton attempted a sonnet commemorating her virtues. The result was little more than a conventional tribute. Successive revision brought technical excellence, a kind of carpentered smoothness, but it could not bring life to the piece. Far more than the sonnet to Lawes, written ten months earlier, this poem betrays the effects of distraction and unrest upon Milton's artistry. He is too carefully impersonal, and he achieves coldness rather than restraint. Both sonnets are also lacking in sufficient substance. Feeling is present, but it needs a closer texture to communicate itself. The sonnet to Mrs. Thomason begins firmly enough:

When faith and love, which parted from thee never,
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,
Meekly thou didst resign this earthy load
Of death, called life, which us from Life doth sever.

But the remainder of the poem is devoted to the simple notion that the good works of the deceased have earned for her a heavenly reward—a notion adequately expressed in the second quatrain and merely elaborated in the sestet. The sonnet has, in other words, no real 'turn' and development. Its pious thought, however sincerely felt, is spread too thin for the form which contains it.

Not until 1921 was the subject of this sonnet identified, and, even then, the discovery did nothing to inform our appreciation. It helps not at all to learn that Mrs. Thomason was the wife of the now famous collector of ephemeral books and pamphlets, that she was a woman 'profoundly read', with knowledge 'amounting to erudition'. The poem does not say so; it is still true that this sonnet could commemorate a man as well as a woman, that it conveys no sense of personal loss, and that the character of its subject in no way emerges. Milton doubtless wrote it to console the bereaved husband, who is not, however, addressed in the poem. Milton and the Presbyterian George Thomason were acquainted from 1641 or before, although never (except, perhaps, in 1654) in the relationship of author and publisher. In the manuscript title of the sonnet, the poet wrote of Mrs. Thomason as 'My Christian Friend', but no other evidence exists of any particular friendship between them.[42]

There were two other funerals to attend in the troubled weeks that followed; but there were no more sonnets. On 13 December 1646 Mary's father was 'sick and weak of body', and Milton was a witness to his will. Shortly before 1 January he was dead.[43] Less than three months later, on 15 March, Milton stood beside the grave of his own father, in the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate. The scrivener had lived to be eighty-four, surviving his wife by ten lonely years. As we note his passing, it is pleasant to recall his grandson's description of 'the old gentleman living wholly retired to his rest and devotion, without the least trouble imaginable'.[44] The poet wrote no elegy when his father died. Indeed, where life itself is eloquent, where death is half-expected, like the surprise of an inevitable rime, perhaps a poem is superfluous.

The last poem that Milton could have shown his father was composed on 23 January 1647, about seven weeks before the strong, clear eyes closed finally. This piece, a Latin ode to John Rouse, librarian of Oxford University, was a remarkable production both metrically and autobiographically. It was probably soon after the surrender of Oxford in June of the preceding year that Milton had dispatched, by request, his various writings in prose and verse for deposit in the Bodleian Library. The pamphlets had arrived safely, but the volume of *Poems* had miscarried, and Rouse had recently asked that a second copy be sent. This solicitude pleased the poet, who, before complying, wrote a half-humorous ode of gratitude to accompany his book. The informal tone of the verses—reminiscent of the *Tetrachordon* sonnet and piece on the *New Forcers of Conscience*—is here, however, accentuated by a very free handling of metre and by a division into strophes and antistrophes which ignores the classical rules of versification. The poem is a bold experiment, a Latin imitation of a Greek tragic chorus, and it has scandalized a few modern critics; but Milton was not ashamed to publish it later with a serious explanation of its metrical liberties. Moreover, after the stiff conventionality of the sonnet on Mrs. Thomason, it tells us something important about the recuperative powers of an original talent.[45]

The ode is addressed to the 1645 *Poems*, not directly to Rouse, and this device permits a somewhat whimsical note in the opening stanzas. Milton's book is really two books, with separate title pages and separate pagination, but in a single binding it reveals a boyish poet who had been all too ignorant of his country's troubles. While he had written in Latin and English and Italian, his youthful feet had scarcely touched the ground. He had not only been innocent in his knowledge of people; he had not even been much of a poet, although he had achieved an unstudied elegance in his verses. Who could have stolen these verses on their journey to Oxford, the home of the Muses?

With such reflections Milton begins the ode. In the second strophe he turns to the tumultuous present, so hostile to the arts. When will civil strife end? The soft and degenerate ease with which England had disgraced her ancient heritage was responsible for current disorders, but perhaps she has now sufficiently atoned for past faults; perhaps the Muses can soon return. In any case, these *Poems* are fortunate, and may hope to escape oblivion. In the third strophe he explains why: Rouse, the custodian of man's noblest works, has been thoughtful enough to request a copy to replace the one lost, and in Bodley's treasurehouse the little book will rest secure in the company of classic authors. The beginning of its life there has been propitious, and a splendid destiny lies ahead. The *epodos* looks into this kindly future: 'You then, my labours, whatever my poor genius has produced, have hardly been in vain. Now at last I bid you look forward to quiet rest, when envy shall have spent itself, in the blessed retreats provided by good Hermes and the watchful care of Rouse, where the prattling tongue of the vulgar shall not penetrate. . . . Perhaps a distant generation and a wiser age will render fairer judgement on all things . . .' Milton, having ventured to appear as a poet in the fourth year of a war, trusts that a sane, untroubled posterity will know his worth. And one year after the publication of his *Poems* he wearily abandons hope for contemporary recognition.

Ironically, in this same month a talented young contemporary was trying in vain to become acquainted with him. At the age of nineteen and while a student at St. John's College, Cambridge, John Hall of Durham had produced a collection of *Essays* and a volume of *Poems*, the publisher of both being John Rothwell, who had published Milton's fourth and fifth pamphlets. The *Essays* had a portrait by William Marshall, who had recently done an alleged portrait of Milton. This precocious youth had also entered into correspondence with Samuel Hartlib, to whom he wrote on 21 December 1646: 'I am much ambitious of the acquaintance of Mr. Milton (who is here said to be the author of that excellent discourse *Of Education* you were pleased to impart). I beseech you be a means to bring us to a correspondency, if you can.' On 4 January Hall was on the verge of writing to Milton directly, and on 8 January he was again begging Hartlib to 'be a means of my acquaintance with Mr. Milton'. It would seem that Milton felt unable to engage in correspondence, but Hall was not discouraged; about March of 1647 he was writing Hartlib: 'I am sorry . . . But I hope I shall win on him when I come to remain at London, as I shall shortly.' (He did come to London, much later in 1647; and in 1649 he was Milton's junior colleague as a writer for the Council of State.[46])

The *Ode to Rouse* was written by a tired and harassed spirit. Its gracious compliments and brave prophecies were composed with a six-months-old baby and a pack of noisy children in the house, a few weeks after the funeral of Mary's father. King Charles was in the custody of the Scots, and no man could guess what tomorrow held for England. The Presbyterians were still in power, and Milton was still more widely known as a 'Divorcer' than as a poet. He had recently turned thirty-eight and his youth was now behind him, in the little book that must wait for better days.

The experience with Rouse may have prompted Milton to have his various prose works bound into one volume for presentation to a few other readers of the sort he had hoped for from the start. In any case, we know that at some time before 1649 he sent such a collection (minus, however, *Of Education*) to Patrick Young, Keeper of the King's Library. He inscribed the volume (in Latin): 'To the most learned man, Patrick Young, John Milton sends these works . . . content with a few such readers.' This collection eventually found its way to the library of Trinity College, Dublin.[47]

The *Ode to Rouse* had been written on 23 January; on 11 February Milton was sued in Chancery by Sir Robert Pye, a haughty and influential Member of Parliament. For legal counsel Milton went to one of the ablest attorneys in London, the eminent John Bradshaw. Their answer to Pye's bill was ready on 22 February, the very day on which Bradshaw was appointed Chief Justice of Chester. The matter of the lawsuit was Milton's role in the tangled financial affairs of his late father-in-law, Richard Powell.[48]

As I remarked earlier, before he died, in Milton's house in Barbican, the squire of Forest Hill manor made a will, which Milton witnessed. It was a remarkable document, full of cavalier promises. To his son Richard he bequeathed the house and lands at Forest Hill (mortgaged to Sir Robert Pye for thirty-one years in June 1640 and actually taken over by Laurence Farre, a servant of Pye, in May or June 1646), the woods and timber there (confiscated by Act of Parliament on 15 July 1646, for the rebuilding of Banbury), and all the household goods (seized by the parliamentarian sequestrators of Oxfordshire and sold to Matthew Appletree of London for £335 on 16 June 1646). To the executor of his will—his wife Anne if twenty-five-year-old Richard refused (as he did)—he bequeathed his houses and lands at Wheatley (all mortgaged, and some, it would seem, doubly mortgaged). In addition to disposing of so much dubious wealth, the will made certain specific requests. His wife should have the jointure which he had never been able to provide (although back in 1621 he had given a bond to her uncle, Abraham Archdale, for £2,000 conditioned on his providing a settlement within a year). His daughter, Mary Milton, should have her marriage portion (of £1,000)—and more 'in case my estate will bear it'. Portions should also be provided for his other, unmarried children. And his debts should be paid.[49]

One of his many debts, it so happened, was to John Milton; indeed, since June of 1643 no interest had been paid on the original loan of £300. With approximately £1,372 still owing him, Milton had a considerable concern in the financial chaos which Powell bequeathed his numerous family. On the other hand, it is doubtful that, early in 1647, he understood much about the affairs of his late father-in-law. They are still bewildering in their complexity. A document published in 1656 convicted Powell of fraudulent practices. Sir Robert Pye's token possession of Forest Hill was apparently a wartime device to ensure that the property did not fall into the hands of others; his 'loving friend' Sir Robert was named in the will as an overseer (along with Sir John Curson) to aid the executor in every way possible. Forest Hill was not even listed in the 'Particular of the real and personal estate of Richard Powell' which was drawn up on 21 November, solemnly sworn to on 4 December, and submitted to the Committee for the Composition of Property Owned by Delinquents. Powell had petitioned this committee for the right to compound soon after his arrival in London, on 6 August, and he had taken the Covenant on 4 December.

As a delinquent he had suffered the automatic sequestration of all his property; but as one granted the full benefits of the Articles of Surrender at Oxford, he was privileged to compound and regain possession upon payment of an appropriate fine. In the particular of his estate he had listed part (not all) of his Wheatley property, valued (with hopeful modesty) at £40 a year, his already-confiscated timber at Forest Hill, valued at £400, his household goods (sold to Appletree for £335), valued at £500, and

£200 of money owing him. He had also listed his £300 debt to Milton (without mentioning the interest overdue), debts of £1,200 to others, and a loss of £3,000 'by reason of these wars'. Evidently unimpressed by this pathetic balance sheet, the Committee for Composition set a fine of £180, on 23 December. Powell died without paying the fine, although his will assumed its payment, as it assumed so many other things.[50]

Powell's family did not have £180 to spare, and the fine was never paid. On the other hand, Milton had the statute staple bond signed by the squire as long ago as 11 June 1627; and under the law, in default of payment, the creditor might have execution of the body, lands, and goods of the debtor. Such a bond took precedence over subsequent agreements made by the debtor. On 15 or 16 December, therefore, shortly before Powell's death, Milton obtained a certificate on his bond from the clerk of the Staple, Sir Thomas Hampson. He then took this certificate to the clerk of the Crown and exchanged it for an extent, to be delivered to the sheriff of Oxfordshire, William Cope. It was the sheriff's responsibility thereupon to impanel a jury, which should decide what property of the debtor might be seized.[51]

Powell's death delayed the usual procedure, for it was duly reported by the sheriff of Oxfordshire, and the writ ordering an inventory by the jury was not sent until 16 July 1647. Meanwhile, Sir Robert Pye, in full possession of the manor of Forest Hill, learned of this unexpected threat to his peaceful tenancy, and his suit on 11 February was an effort to make Milton fully disclose his claim. Milton did so in his answer of 22 February. He expressed no intention of extending either Forest Hill or the property at Wheatley, but he described the statute staple bond which he was trying to put into execution, and he called attention to the fact that it antedated Sir Robert's mortgage of 1640.

On 26 March, eleven days after the burial of Milton's father, Mrs. Powell probated her husband's will, which bequeathed to her, as executrix, the Wheatley land and houses. She and her son agreed that this property would constitute the jointure which was supposed to have been settled on her at the time of her marriage, and, presumably to secure legal sanction for this agreement, her cousin Richard Archdale immediately put into the Court of Common Pleas, as a claim against the Powell estate, the original bond which Richard Powell had given his father as security, back in 1621.[52] The freehold land at Wheatley had been mortgaged on 10 January 1632 to Dr. Henry Ashworth, as security for a loan of £400, but before his death Powell had managed to reduce the principal debt to £300 and to pay interest up to January 1645. Dr. Ashworth had died in 1633, and his son Edwards had shown no disposition to foreclose. Some time after March 1647, therefore, when young Richard Powell went abroad, his mother took the remainder of her family to live at Wheatley. She was certainly there on 5 August when the Oxfordshire jury, evidently recognizing Sir

Robert Pye's claim to the leased land at Forest Hill, caused the freehold property at Wheatley to be seized into the King's hands. Milton was granted full possession on 20 November.[53]

The twelve good men and true of Oxfordshire, who met on 5 August to take an inventory of Richard Powell's possessions, were hardly uninfluenced by some of the parties involved. Their inquisition did not mention Forest Hill, but it carefully noted that Mrs. Anne Powell, widow, 'stands possessed of and in a third part of all and singular the [Wheatley] premises aforesaid with the appurtenances as of freehold for the term of her life as her portion from the endowment of the aforesaid Richard her former husband, and that the said Anne now survives and exists in full life at Wheatley aforesaid'. She was indeed 'in full life' at Wheatley, and determined to profit from the legal control of the property now given her son-in-law, although no court had granted her the powers which the Oxfordshire jury attested. Milton completely accepted the arrangement —which a court was later to disallow. For three years, however, Mrs. Powell was to enjoy one-third of the income from the property which her husband had improvidently encumbered, and there is reason to believe that she occupied the house on the estate while the cottages, meadows, pasture lands, and tithes of corn were being rented to others.[54]

It is most unlikely that she felt any gratitude toward her son-in-law for his acquiescence in this plan. In the circumstances, anything she received from him would have seemed less than her right. Unless she resented her late husband's financial ineptitude—and there is no evidence that she did (indeed, her own extravagance may have contributed to it)—she naturally felt that Milton, and the rebellious government which he supported, were directly responsible for the decline in her family's fortunes and the injustice of her plight. It is even possible that Richard Powell's death was a consequence of conditions suffered during the siege of Oxford; but if there was no connexion, his widow doubtless saw one. In countless ways the war had injured her, and Milton was of the enemy party.

If the complicated emotions of people long dead defy our conjecture, the facts of financial reports and official documents can tell us something. Milton held the Wheatley property for not quite nine years before he returned it to the Powells. He collected his expenses and the original loan of £300, but waived collection of the full £500 to which his bond entitled him. He also waived collection of the more than £200 of interest, due since November of 1647, to which he was legally entitled. From April 1648 until the law finally interfered, he paid his mother-in-law her widow's thirds, a total of more than £80.[55] All in all, he saved the Powell family something like £500. Eventually, they regained possession of the entire Wheatley property, and, after the Restoration, they regained Forest Hill. Mrs. Powell, in the course of time, even received a substantial sum toward the marriage portion of which her husband's prodigality had deprived her. But Milton never received one penny toward the dowry promised Mary Powell, despite the explicit provisions of her father's will.

Sir Robert Pye's suit in Chancery against Milton came, of course, to nothing, after the apparent threat to his possession of Forest Hill was removed. On 27 November 1647 he entered a brief and pointless denial of Milton's answer, and six days later he indented Forest Hill to his son John Pye. On 16 June 1649 the court formally dismissed the case, with costs awarded the defendant.[56]

Unquestionably Milton was relieved when his wife's family left for the country and welcome peace descended upon the big house in Barbican. A letter written on 20 April 1647, two days after Easter, gives us an unexpected glimpse of his state of mind while Mary's brothers and sisters were still under foot, and while Mrs. Powell was still present with her worries and her complaints. He had received a letter from Carlo Dati—the first word from any of his Italian acquaintances since the memorable journey of eight years ago, despite the fact that he had sent a number of copies of his *Epitaphium Damonis* by way of expressing thanks for hospitality extended. He now learned that the talented and precocious Dati had written to him three times before, letters that must have been lost in transit. Acknowledging this latest and successful attempt at communication with almost pathetic gratitude, he could not conceal his feeling of general depression:

> those who are closely bound to me by the mere fact of proximity or by some other tie of no real importance, as by chance or by some legal claim, although they have nothing else to commend themselves to me are with me daily, they deafen me with their noise and, I swear, torment me as often as they please; whereas those endeared to me by congenial manners and temperament and taste are almost all separated from me by death or by the cruel accident of distance, and are usually snatched from my sight so swiftly that I seem compelled to spend my days in almost perpetual loneliness.

He was still mourning Diodati, as the letter further reveals, but recent events had increased his desolation. He had learned that no solitude can compare with that of uncongenial society. He had learned, as he went on to tell Carlo Dati, that peace and quiet for the leisurely pursuit of literature are impossible 'in the midst of civil war, bloodshed, flight, and rapine'. England was still in turmoil, and his own house had not escaped the sweep of revolution.

Milton regarded his reply to Dati as a literary composition, a specimen of learned and elegant correspondence. He did not, therefore, mention his marriage, his nine-months-old baby, or the very recent death of his father. The reference to his domestic misery, caused by the unnamed Powells (that he refers also to his wife is quite incredible!), was the more significant because it broke through the tone of graceful compliment which decorum demanded in such a letter. Milton allowed it to remain since, artistically, it not only emphasized the mood of the *Epitaphium Damonis* (which Dati had referred to) but also provided a point of departure for nostalgic recollections of Florence and the pleasant companionship of Italian youths. He sent cordial greetings to Coltellini, Francini, Frescobaldi, Malatesti, the younger 'Clementillo', and anyone else who remembered him—indeed to the whole of Gaddi's Academy! As for his literary efforts, about which Dati had naturally inquired, he had a confession to make which is particularly revealing. He announced the publication of his *Poems* in 1645. The English verse he will not send to his friend, who cannot read English. The Latin verse he would have sent long since, but for one embarrassing fact: there are harsh expressions about the Pope in some of the poems. It is a way of speaking, Milton explained lamely, customary among Protestants, and perhaps may be understood and forgiven. For he had decided to send the *Poemata* to his Italian friend (he eventually sent two copies). Let Dati remember, not only the indulgence which his forefathers had granted to Dante and Petrarch, but also the freedom of speech which the Florentines, with urbane tolerance, had allowed John Milton when he was once their guest.[57]

Shortly after the departure of the Powells, and probably in August of 1647, Milton took a significant step: he gave up the 'great house' in Barbican, and moved to a small one in High Holborn. After not quite two years, the Barbican residence had become a monument to frustrated purposes. Two men had died in its ample rooms. A plan of life had died too. The space so necessary for the accommodation of additional pupils had with ironic suddenness been occupied by clamorous relatives. When the refugees were finally gone, Milton had no heart for beginning again. He needed fresh surroundings. The new house was comfortably, reassuringly small, and its back opened into Lincoln's Inn fields. There, as Edward Phillips later expressed it, he was able to live 'a private and quiet life, still prosecuting his studies and curious search into knowledge, the grand affair perpetually of his life'. Cyriack Skinner, another pupil, had been admitted to Lincoln's Inn on 31 July.[58]

Some cryptic notes by Samuel Hartlib, probably made at some time in 1647, seem to record his recognition of the end of Milton's experiments in teaching. He wrote: 'Mr. Milton's Academy and Mr. Lawrence's Academy'—and then deleted 'Mr. Milton's'. More provocative are some jottings following a note on 'S[ir] W[illiam] Waller's College at Winchester, or Plantation of Hampshire'. One of these is: 'Foundation of an Academy. His removing of Mr. Milton'—with the last four words cancelled. Hartlib also listed some possible 'Commissioners for the Act of the Council for schooling', among them Mr. (John) Dury, Mr. (John?) Pell, Mr. (William?) Rand, Dr. (Thomas?) Horne, (Marchamont) Needham, and Milton. These scribblings tell us more about Hartlib than they do about Milton, and yet hint at the widening circle of Milton's acquaintance.

Another new name emerges in a letter of 17 August 1648, in which John Sadler tells Hartlib: 'If you see Mr. Milton, I beseech you present my real service to him; I spare him in not writing.'[59]

Although he had promised in April 1647 to send Carlo Dati a copy of his *Poemata*, Milton delayed doing so (perhaps regretting his promise), and Dati reminded him in a long letter of 22 October/1 November 1647. This communication, friendly and effusive, also asked Milton to compose some memorial verses on Francesco Rovai for publication in Italy; moreover, by a lengthy section of literary criticism and philological comment, it challenged Milton to respond. But Milton, happy as he had been to hear from his Italian friend earlier, was now too absorbed in other matters to reply. He sent off two copies of the Latin section of his *Poems*. He did not answer Dati's letter, or write the poem requested.[60]

There was a pleasant vista from the rear of the Holborn dwelling, but a mist was forming, now, on the left side of Milton's left eye, making objects in front of him seem smaller when he closed the other eye. He realized that he would soon have the sight of only one eye, and bravely he tried to reconcile himself to the awful possibility of total blindness. The baby, little Anne, was a year old, and to her saddened parents it was already evident that she would never enjoy a normal life. She was lame, and, whatever the reason—lack of proper care, or a naturally ill constitution—she grew more and more decrepit. As the years went by, her bodily infirmity, her defective speech, and her complete illiteracy were to prove a daily reminder of the domestic confusion that attended her birth. Final proof is lacking, but it seems highly probable that Milton's first child was not only deformed but also mentally retarded. Perhaps this is the real reason for his abandoning teaching and going into seclusion. To compound the cruel irony, little Anne was pretty ('a brave girl'); we learn from an admiring sister that she grew up to be a beautiful woman.[61]

In the autumn and winter of 1647 there was time again for writing, but the epic on King Arthur no longer interested Milton, and the drama of 'Paradise Lost' had also lost its fascination. He needed a subject more suited to his mood, a subject that would permit him to express his weariness, his frustration, his embattled faith. Although we cannot be sure, it was probably during this period that he remembered and reviewed his lists of Old Testament subjects for tragedies and saw, for the first time, the artistic challenge and the overwhelming pertinence of the story of Samson.[62]

In 1647 John Milton had much in common with the mighty hero of Judges. It was not merely that he faced the terrible handicap of blindness; he was also a Nazarite, dedicated from birth to God's special service, and now surrounded by enemies who insulted and slandered him. Like Samson he was a solitary champion at bay, a prophet of a righteous cause, without honour in his own country. Israel was still under Philistian domination, and the deeds of God's chosen one had been ignored by

Israel's governors and heads of tribes. It was easy for Milton, of all men, to understand, and imaginatively to recreate, the discouragement, the mental anguish, the indignation which Samson must have felt. On 14 December 1647, more than fifty London ministers, all of them Presbyterians of the Sion College group, signed an attack on toleration which was published the following month. Twenty-two errors were specifically enumerated and condemned, among them Milton's attitude toward divorce. Like Samson he was an outcast. As for Samson's loss of sight, he had only to find appropriate words for his own growing fears.[63]

However, to stop with this statement of his motivation would be most misleading. In beginning a play on *Samson Agonistes* Milton had no thought of creating a personal or political allegory, a thinly veiled spiritual autobiography. He was an artist, and he proposed the re-creation of a severely classical form and manner. Moreover, the story of Samson *in its essentials* was not, and could not be, his own story. He had not disobeyed God's command, and his eyes had not been put out as a punishment for anything. He had not revealed God's holy secret to a woman, nor had his own wife betrayed him to his enemies. He had never been glorious like Samson, and he was not possessed of strength without wisdom. Unlike the Hebrew champion, he had not dishonoured his God; he felt no need for repentance and regeneration.

With these facts understood, we can repeat that there were elements in the story of Samson which his own experience enabled him to understand and to express with profound emotion. There were enough such elements to make the subject fascinating to him in this period of disillusion. He envisaged Samson as a man of about his own years (the Biblical Samson was about forty, it was thought), in the 'flower of youth and strength' and with a loving father still alive, though old and feeble. Milton knew how it felt to be called to God's work, and yet be defeated:

> I was His nursling once and choice delight,
> His destined from the womb . . .
> Under His special eye
> Abstemious I grew up and thrived amain;
> He led me on to mightiest deeds
> Above the nerve of mortal arm
> Against the uncircumcised, our enemies,
> But now hath cast me off as never known . . . [633–41]

Unlike Milton, Samson was punished for disobedience, and knew it; but Milton writes with eloquence when he imagines Samson to question:

> Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God,
> Designed for great exploits, if I must die
> Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out,
> Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze . . .? [30–34]

The poet causes the Hebrew to humiliate himself again and again in expiation for his sin, but when the Chorus reminds him that 'Israel still serves with all his sons', Samson is allowed to say:

> *That* fault I take not on me, but transfer
> On Israel's governors and heads of tribes,
> Who seeing those great acts which God had done
> Singly by me against their conquerors,
> Acknowledged not, or not at all considered
> Deliverance offered. I on the other side
> Used no ambition to commend my deeds;
> The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the doer.
> But they persisted deaf, and would not seem
> To count them things worth notice . . . [241–50]

Milton, when he wrote these lines, must have thought of his own efforts at reform, and the cold reception they had met with from persons in authority.

> But what more oft in nations grown corrupt
> And by their vices brought to servitude
> Than to love bondage more than liberty,
> Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty,
> And to despise, or envy, or suspect
> Whom God hath of His special favour raised
> As their deliverer—if he aught begin,
> How frequent to desert him, and at last
> To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds? [268–76]

Trying conscientiously to reconstruct the emotions of Samson, as also the spirit of the Book of Judges, he succeeded in recapturing the mood of his sonnet, *I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs*. In the recent *Ode to Rouse*, moreover, he had blamed England's troubles on the degenerate ease of the people. Putting some of his own thoughts into the mouth of a dramatic character provided, no doubt, a catharsis of sorts.

The *Ode to Rouse* may have been written while Milton was first experimenting with the soliloquies and choral songs of *Samson Agonistes*. At any rate, the ode offers us a Latin counterpart—and the only one—of the audacious rhythms and free metrical paragraphs to be found in the drama. The subtly controlled irregularities of *Lycidas* had perhaps inspired Milton to go even further in his break with the blank-verse pattern and in his confident reliance upon his own ear. He had not yet formed an antipathy toward rime (that was to come, eventually), but in his tragedy he dared to use rime as freely, and as infrequently, as he used traditional metres. In the *Ode to Rouse* he had adopted the conventional division into strophes, antistrophes, and epode, but had ignored the conventional correspondence of lines and rhythms. For the tragedy he discarded strophes, antistrophes, and epodes as unnecessary, reasoning that these stanzas were not, after all, intended to be sung. *Samson Agonistes* represents, therefore, a step in the direction of metrical irregularity but slightly in advance of the Latin *Ode*, yet considerably beyond *Lycidas* or *On Time* or *At a Solemn Music*. The free handling of rhythm and rime is remarkably affecting in choral outbursts of emotion:

> God of our fathers, what is man!
> That Thou towards him with hand so various,
> Or might I say contrarious,
> Temperest Thy providence through his short course,
> Not evenly, as Thou rulest
> The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
> Irrational and brute.
> Nor do I name of men the common rout
> That wandering loose about
> Grow up and perish, as the summer fly,
> Heads without name no more remembered,
> But such as Thou hast solemnly elected,
> With gifts and graces eminently adorned
> To some great work, Thy glory
> And people's safety, which in part they effect;
> Yet toward these thus dignified, Thou oft
> Amidst their height of noon
> Changest Thy countenance and Thy hand, with no regard
> Of highest favours past
> From Thee on them, or them to Thee of service. [667–86]

Pious Milton would never have committed to paper such an unrestrained speech as his own sentiments, nor have we any warrant for attributing such sentiments to him. But putting this into a play may very well have brought a release of pent-up misery and puzzlement.

This is not to say that the above passage expresses Milton's *subconscious* feeling. A man writing a tragedy on a subject which has peculiar interest for him will inevitably express many of his own views; but if he is any sort of dramatist at all, he will also draw upon emotions which he has felt once and outgrown, ideas which he has held and since discarded, emotions and convictions which he has known vicariously in the writings of others or in the speech of friends—not to mention the attitudes which his creative ability enables him to imagine for appropriate characters and situations. In reading a poem like *Samson Agonistes*, therefore, we do both Milton and ourselves a grave injustice by labelling as autobiographical any passage for which there is not confirmation in Milton's undramatic work or in objective reality. An artist does considerably more than express his own feelings; he colours them, heightens them, modifies them, distorts them, to achieve the effects he has in mind. His feelings are materials with which to work, and there is nothing sacred about their original shape.

In *Samson Agonistes* Milton is a dramatist. Although not challenging the position of Shakespeare in English letters, he is nevertheless a dramatist. As such, he is not writing allegory. He identifies himself with Samson as any good playwright identifies himself with his characters; and when parallels of circumstance or of probable attitude make the identification natural, he is perhaps unusually eloquent. But he also identifies himself with Manoa, Harapha, the Chorus, and Dalila. Manoa is an indulgent and practical parent, but he is not Milton's father. Harapha is a noisy bully, not a Presbyterian minister (or Claudius Salmasius). Furthermore, Dalila is not Mary Powell or any other woman known to Milton; she is what the wife of Samson would have to be, if violence is not to be done to the story. She is a fascinating, despicable creature who betrays her husband.

But does the portrait of Dalila not owe something to Milton's unfortunate experience with Mary Powell, whose family were Anglicans and Royalist sympathizers? The answer to this question is 'No'. For more than two hundred years scholarship has lowered itself to nasty-minded and malicious gossip in its interpretation of Milton's first marriage, and it is about time that it exhibit a little fairness and dignity. On any level except that of backstairs whispering we have no reason for supposing that Milton's relationship with Mary after 1645 was other than pleasant and happy. Since Dalila was Samson's second wife, and since we do not know precisely when this part of the play was composed, we have as much justification for guessing that Katherine Woodcock Milton sat for the portrait as for believing that Dalila owes anything to Mary.

But the venom, the bitterness, the misogyny exhibited in the characterization of Dalila! Critics have talked much about these things, and it would be interesting, now, if one of them would try writing a play on Samson with a chorus sympathetic to Dalila and with Samson himself more kindly disposed to his betrayer. In Milton's play, whose inevitable themes might have prompted a flood of invective against women, the misogyny is, in simple fact, traditional, dramatically intended, and entirely confined to thirty-six consecutive lines (1010–45). There is nothing misogynous, nothing unusual in Samson's hatred of the particular woman who has wronged him. Nor can we call misogynous Milton's ideas on the place of women in marriage. These ideas may be obsolete in Western civilization, may seem to us deplorable, but they are no more 'misogynous' than was our ancestors' acceptance of slavery 'misanthropic'. They are present in the play because of their dramatic relevance and because of the seventeenth-century view of marriage; they tell us nothing whatever about the ways of women to Milton, or the ways of Milton to women. Furthermore, some of Samson's colourful epithets directed at his wife—'specious monster', 'accomplished snare'—are not only justified dramatically but also carefully ambiguous. And Samson is amazingly careful, in the circumstances, to make a distinction between wives who are good and wives who are bad. It is impossible to find a single definite, demonstrable parallel between Dalila and Mary Powell, and the fact needs to be stated twice for every ugly suspicion that crawls into print.[64]

As I have said, a playwright will draw upon emotions which he has felt once and since outgrown, and it may well be that the shock and indignation and wounded pride which Milton experienced in 1642 when Mary deserted him were recollected in tranquillity for dramatic purposes. But if so, the passages which profited from feelings thus creatively recaptured are not truly autobiographical passages, and they will, moreover, forever elude us. Searching for them is not a legitimate business of criticism; futile speculation on their existence is not a legitimate business of biography. David Masson, who has given us one of the fullest surveys of alleged autobiography in Milton's drama, admits that 'it is impossible to point out a single particular in which, having chosen for his subject the Biblical story of Samson's dying revenge, he has overstrained it for a personal purpose'. This is true—and so are the conclusions which sanity will draw from it.

Milton uses not quite half of the Biblical account, and his omissions are worth noticing. He gives, for example, the essential facts of Samson's birth, but wisely omits various details which would have marred the unity of the composition by diverting our attention from the protagonist. As the first wife is comparatively unimportant, details of her conduct are also omitted; and Milton avoids almost all reference to the symbolic number seven. His Samson, moreover, is not the coarse, picturesque, grimly humorous fellow that we meet in the four chapters of Judges. He has his faults, but they are not sub-heroic. Milton does not let his Samson return to the first wife after he has deserted her. He does not permit him to indulge in grotesque revenge with firebrands and foxes. He discreetly avoids the whole incident of Samson patronizing the harlot at Gaza. The Biblical Samson is not married to Dalila, but Milton gives his hero tragic dignity by having him wed, with the idea of serving God, the cause of his downfall. The poet omits, too, the many details of Dalila's three attempts upon Samson's strength, these being ridiculous for a protagonist of tragedy. And nothing is said about Samson's 'judging' Israel for twenty years, for this point does not suit Milton's conception of an unsupported leader. The actual incidents of the drama, of course, up to the time of the catastrophe, represent artistic invention; the visits of the Chorus, Manoa, Dalila, Harapha, and the Officer are entirely without Scriptural justification. The last two people are creations of the poet; and both Dalila and Manoa, as well as Samson, take on a reality which they do not possess in the Bible.

The title of Milton's play does not occur in the Trinity Manuscript, and like the play as a whole, it shows a better knowledge of ancient practice than the dramatic notes of *c.* 1641 exhibit. In adding a distinguishing epithet to the name of his protagonist he was following the example set by the masters of Attic tragedy. Samson 'Agonistes' is more than Samson the Wrestler, or athlete, contesting blindly at the public games of the Philistines. 'Agonistes' means also an advocate, an actor, and a champion; and *agon*, in the Christian tradition, connotes moral struggle for virtue. When we think again of the play, each of these possible definitions takes on meaning.

To understand and enjoy Milton's poem as an imitation of Greek drama, we must not judge the *Samson* as we would judge a modern play. Although 'good theatre' as the Greeks thought of theatre, it is, as Milton warns in his preface, 'much different from what among us passes for best'. If, for example, we damn his play for lacking suspense or surprise, as we now experience these emotions, then we must damn almost all of the extant Greek tragedies. How would a Greek of the fifth century interpret the action of *Samson*? To begin with, we must assume that he is generally familiar with the story, for Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides assumed this in their audiences. Our hypothetical Greek knows, therefore, that Samson is going to pull a building down on the Philistines and on himself, and he does not expect to be surprised; he expects to be interested and instructed. As the play begins, the question in his mind is, 'How is this thing going to be brought about?' Almost as soon as he is well into Samson's *prologos*, then, his attention is caught; for the blind hero is obviously in no physical, mental, or spiritual condition for the feat which the reader knows he must perform. If strength is returning, there is no incentive to use it. Samson's mind is torn and weary with self-reproach; spiritually he has not yet returned to harmony with God's will. A Greek reader would be pleased at once with such an opening situation. He would realize that the *epeisodia* of such a play must slowly remove these various impediments to the catastrophe, and he would expect the story to develop, therefore, not so much by visible action as by dialogue and choral song. He would expect, in other words, psychological drama.

The catastrophe consists, of course, in Samson's pulling down the building upon himself and his enemies—not in his being ordered to the feast. Samson's will is responsible for the catastrophe, and everything which helps to determine Samson's will is 'incident' in the play, as the Greeks understood incident. There is little external action, but the drama is full of conflict. Since the hero must be prepared for the catastrophe, his reconciliation with God becomes of the first importance. So long as he doubts, so long as he questions, so long as he is anywise out of harmony with God's purpose, he is not a fitting instrument of that purpose. This spiritual conflict begins with the twenty-third line of the *prologos*, and it is not over—Samson is not ready—until his calm, dignified speech to the Philistine Officer (1413–26), his last in the play. Then his doubt is overcome, his arrogance and anger are past; he is once more the worthy agent of the Almighty. Attic dramatists—and Milton—were interested in the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of the old stories; hence speech predominates over action; plot is subordinate to character and emotion. Since in the *Samson*, as in its Greek models, we find what would normally constitute the last act in a modern play, the subject-matter of Acts I and II must be given in dialogue. This problem of exposition resulted, inevitably, in pure narrative playing a far more prominent part than in later drama. As a matter of sober fact, Milton's play has more incident and is less prolix than many of the ancient tragedies to which he might have turned for inspiration.

In brief, what happens in *Samson Agonistes* is this: At the outset the hero is almost unconscious of his returning strength; his spirit is not yet reconciled to God. But from his conversation with the Chorus he learns to put the divine will before his own. Manoa's visit then depresses him momentarily, but encountering Dalila again, he learns that he is at last master of himself. The quarrel with the giant Harapha, by completing the reconciliation with God and by bringing the urge to act, prepares him for the catastrophe. Samson acquits himself like a reborn Samson before he pulls down destruction upon the Philistines. The psychological development is the thing that makes the play.

It is easy to see how Milton came more and more to look upon Samson as a powerful symbol of man's weakness and strength. But one day, after he realized that blindness threatened him, when the Presbyterians were still damning his views on divorce, when he felt lonely and miserable and frustrated in his life's work, he must have wondered how Samson managed to rise above his troubles, resist all temptations to withdraw, and fulfil, at last, his great purpose. The moment at which the poet first considered the mental process that led to Samson's regeneration was the moment at which the drama was conceived. For then, and only then, did the Old Testament story cease to be a story, or an allegory (as in *The Reason of Church Government*), or a convenient analogy (as in *Areopagitica* and *Colasterion*), and become instead a theme for moving tragedy. We cannot say, of course, just when the moment of creative insight came; but we can feel confident that Milton felt no deep personal concern over Samson's attitudes until he, too, was a rejected champion facing the grim fact of blindness. This could hardly have happened much before 1647.

*Samson Agonistes* began as an artist's attempt to naturalize Greek tragedy in English (an extraordinary revolutionary this, trying to revive a dead art form), as a moralist's attempt to produce the kind of literary work solemnly promised in *The Reason of Church Government*—a poem 'doctrinal and exemplary to a nation', done in the genre 'wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign'. Milton was drawn to his particular subject, then, by the striking pertinence of the Samson story and by his realization of the psychological struggle implied in Samson's eventual victory. But as the drama grew, as the years went by, Milton's varied experiences more and more determined the tone and emphases of the composition. The dark mysteries of God's providence, the incredible stupidity of 'the common rout', the terrible responsibility of the chosen ones, the danger and dazzling power of intuition, the necessity for patience, the ambiguity of final victory—all these products of Milton's disillusion and stubborn faith combine to make a poem that is not a sermon, not a political allegory, but a profoundly moving drama touched with prophecy. God's lonely and miserable champion would eventually triumph, though the cost might be death, the epilogue a final irony. Milton knew; he might even be living the tragedy.[65]

As *Samson Agonistes* took shape, life was still distracting, hostile to the writing of poetry. Soon after May of 1646, when King Charles fled to the protection of the Scottish army at Newark, armed resistance by Royalists had come to a close, and the civil war had ended. But the peace was menacing. Nothing had really been settled. No one knew what to do with the King, now that he had been beaten on a hundred battlefields. The victorious Parliament was split by the bitter fight over toleration. Presbyterians and Independents struggled for control, and the King himself, courted hopefully by his Scottish subjects, shrewdly encouraged the dissension, playing each faction against the other. There were months of futile negotiation, between England and Scotland, between Parliament and its conquered monarch. For a time the Presbyterians dominated policy, capitalizing on the universal desire for a return to normal living, and strengthened by the presence of the Scottish army. As the year drew to a close, the hierarchy of Presbyterian Church government was actually operating in London, and Parliament, its July ultimatum skilfully parried by the King, had begun to consider the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In 1647 the uncertainty turned into open confusion, and the balance of political power shifted with a series of momentous events. At the end of January the Scottish army withdrew from Newcastle, its headquarters since 13 May of the preceding year, and King Charles became the embarrassing captive of his own English subjects. From 16 February until 4 June he was a prisoner at Holmby House in Northamptonshire, while negotiations dragged on in complete and disturbing futility. The Presbyterians, evidently unaware of their strategic loss through the withdrawal of the Scots, promptly weakened their position further by antagonizing their own army. The soldiers, Cromwell's 'men of spirit'—the hard-fighting, zealous, Scripture-quoting, democratic, political-minded Englishmen who had won victories for Parliament—deeply resented Parliament's decision that they should disband and be completely reorganized. This was an army of sectaries, an army that had fought long and well for a measure of religious toleration; and having won the war they had no intention of losing the peace. When the Presbyterian Parliament ordered them to disband, they resisted.

On 4 June, one month after the first meeting of the provincial Presbyterian Synod of London, the army abducted the King, and held a great rendezvous near Newmarket to consider their future course. This was mutiny, and during the months that followed, government in England was largely by intimidation. When Parliament moved to conciliate the army, the citizens of London, predominantly Presbyterian, tried to intimidate Parliament. On 26 July there was rioting in the city, and Parliament quickly changed its attitude. Then, on 6 August, Fairfax marched the army into London, and the balance shifted again. Now it was the army's turn to treat with the King, and the methods employed by its leaders, the new deference shown to royalty, aroused the suspicions of the common soldiers, many of whom were becoming more and more republican in sentiment. As the radical element gained in influence, there was mutiny within the army itself. On 11 November, in the midst of the growing confusion, the King suddenly escaped to the Isle of Wight. This dramatic event had immediate consequences. Discipline was restored in the army; Parliament lost patience with the King and declared all negotiations at an end; the King was placed under closer surveillance in his new prison; and the Scots, indignant over the turn of events, decided to interfere once more in English affairs. They had made a secret treaty with Charles. In April of 1648 it was known that a Scottish army was preparing for invasion, and Royalists everywhere took heart. In April there was a Royalist outbreak in London itself.

Although once more proof is lacking, the biographer here assumes that *Samson Agonistes* could not be completed. In any case, in April of 1648 its author's mood (unable to sustain original composition?) was clearly reflected in translations of nine psalms into English riming verse.[66] The consolation and relief which Milton found in this exercise are easily guessed, for his choices are an eloquent suggestion of a troubled and despairing soul. The first, Psalm 80, is the lament of a desolated country, tired of strife and tears, praying God to return His divine favour. Israel, of course, becomes England in the translator's mind, although in a few lines he can hardly avoid thinking of his personal unhappiness:

> A strife Thou mak'st us, and a prey,
> To every neighbour foe;
> Among themselves they laugh, they play,
> And flouts at us they throw.

The spirit of *Samson Agonistes* is everywhere in these psalms (as the spirit of the Psalms is everywhere in *Samson Agonistes*). Although in translating Milton was forced to elaborate slightly, some of his additions may have been influenced, not only by the necessities of rime and metre, but also by his personal thoughts:

Shine forth, *and from Thy cloud give light,*
*And on our foes Thy dread.*

He italicizes all such differences from the Hebrew original, and they are occasionally of biographical interest.

Psalm 81 explains why God is not now delivering His people as in days past. It is their own stubbornness of heart which is at fault. Milton elaborates his text with synonyms rather than additions:

Then did I leave them to their will
And to their wandering mind;
Their own conceits they followed still,
Their own devices blind.

If the people would serve God aright,

Then would I soon bring down their foes
*That now so proudly rise* . . .

Psalm 82 is a vision of divine judgement against the high spiritual powers whose rule 'in darkness' is responsible for the wickedness of the world:

God in the great assembly stands
*Of kings and lordly states* . . .

These rulers, who fail to 'regard the weak and fatherless', may be sons of God but they shall die like men. Psalm 83 is also a song of judgement, a prayer that God will punish the enemies of His people, who plot and lend '*their armèd hands*' against the righteous:

As Zeba and Zalmunna *bled*,
So let their princes *bleed.*
*For they amidst their pride* have said
By right, now, shall we seize
God's houses . . .

Psalm 84 is a lyric of devotion to God's house, and Psalm 85 is an anthem of trouble and divine deliverance. Psalm 86 is a kind of liturgy, highly personal in feeling, and it may have brought Milton a special catharsis in translation:

Thy *gracious* ear, O Lord, incline,
O hear me, *I Thee pray*,
For I am poor, and almost pine
With need *and sad decay*. . . .
I in the day of my distress
Will call on Thee *for aid*,
For Thou wilt *grant* me *free access*
*And* answer *what I prayed*. . . .
For great Thy mercy is toward me,
And Thou hast freed my soul
Ev'n from the lowest Hell set free
*From deepest darkness foul.*

O God, the proud against me rise . . .
Some sign of good to me afford,
And let my foes *then* see
And be ashamed . . .

Psalm 87, in praise of Sion, the mother of nations, is comparatively lacking in biographical implications.

But Milton ended this series of translations with Psalm 88. Like the first of the series it is an elegy, a lyric lament of tribulation; but unlike the first, and like *Samson Agonistes*, it is an expression of deep personal woe. The psalmist fears a lifelong severance from human intercourse as the result of some incurable affliction. Beyond doubt Milton was attracted to this poem by his own dread of approaching blindness, for it was not even necessary to modify the wording of the original to make it apply to himself:

Thou in the lowest pit *profound*
Hast set me *all forlorn*,
Where thickest darkness *hovers round*,
In horrid deeps *to mourn*. . . .
Thou dost my friends from me estrange,
And mak'st me odious,
Me to them odious, *for they change*,
And I here pent up thus.
Through sorrow and affliction great
Mine eye grows dim and dead;
Lord, all the day I Thee entreat,
My hands to Thee I spread. . . .
In darkness can Thy mighty *hand*
*Or* wondrous acts be known,
Thy justice in the *gloomy* land
Of *dark* oblivion? . . .
Lover and friend Thou hast removed
And severed from me far.
They *fly me now* whom I have loved,
And as in darkness are.

In April of 1648, when Milton translated these nine psalms, his left eye had grown 'dim and dead', and his health was wretched, probably as a result of the medicines which he was frantically taking to preserve his sight. It was some comfort perhaps, for a man in such personal misery, to realize that another poet had walked through the same shadows. It was some comfort, for a man who saw in his country's troubles the rebuke of an angry God, to reflect that it had happened before. In making his translations he allowed himself but little freedom, for the original was more pertinent than a paraphrase.

It is doubtful that any modern critic would consider Milton's psalms of 1648 satisfactory as poetry. Sung to an appropriate hymn tune, they might seem smooth enough; but read aloud, their alternate rimes and alternate tetrameters and trimeters are tinkling and monotonous. The wording would seem fairly accurate, but the sweep and resonance and subtle variety of the Hebrew are absent. In his schoolboy paraphrases Milton came as close to catching the spirit of the originals as in these. On the other hand, the translations of his maturity must be regarded as exercises in *morale* as well as in linguistics. They compensated for unaccountable stoppages in direct personal expression. The suggestion sometimes made, that Milton hoped to produce a new hymnal, ignores both the nature of the psalms chosen and the state of the poet's mind in 1648, to say nothing of the fact of a hymnal not produced.

The translations done, what did Milton turn to next? What occupied his restless mind and pen during the spring and summer of 1648? We do not know; but if I am right in interpreting his translations as attempted scholarly bridges from frustrated poetic activity to something else that might assure mental health, we may guess that he turned now, hopefully, to some form of prose composition. If he had not essayed it earlier, in a busy period of teaching, it may have been in 1648 that he wrote his Art of Logic.[67] This Latin work is, for Milton, an exceptionally pedestrian, even disorderly performance. Its material is largely derivative, and a cluttered appendix includes not only part of a commentary on Peter Ramus by George Downam but also an abridgement of a life of Ramus by John Thomas Freigius. The book purports to be a full treatment of Ramist logic—potentially a highly controversial subject, with theological implications. Except for one anti-trinitarian statement—'*solus pater est verus Deus*'—Milton manages to make it seem tame and dull. In most of it, Ramus gets quite lost as his avowed champion rehearses congenial suggestions on rhetoric from Aristotle and Cicero. When Milton was not in the mood for poetry, he was sometimes capable of the most arid pedantry. Perhaps, for scholar-poets, if not for others, heights necessitate depths.

Whenever the *Artis Logicæ Plenior Institutio* was written, a prose work by Milton that probably belongs to 1648 was his *Brief History of Moscovia.*[68] His reading thus far in geographies (normally concerned with many countries) had left him highly critical; the writers attempted too much, told too much, and often left untold the very things a reader most wanted to know. If one wanted to learn, for example, about Russia—and even less-known countries lying eastward as far as Cathay—it meant stumbling through 'a wood of words' in many different writers, searching for material that was really 'useful, and only worth observation'. Paulus Jovius had had the right idea; he had described only Russia and Britain. This selectivity was an example worth imitating; one could draw upon what had been discovered by English voyages to the East. The idea appealed to Milton, and he attempted a concise compilation of what could be learned from the voyagers.

The result, in our perspective, is neither very scholarly nor very interesting, nor very revealing to the biographer. That Milton was fascinated by the human misery and intense cold found by travellers to Russia is hardly surprising. The English visitors were also impressed by the Muscovite capacity for alcoholic consumption, which Milton duly reported, emphasizing the drunken, whoring clergy. On the whole, however, he was an impersonal, second-hand historian, hoping to exemplify a thesis. The nearest he came to introducing a personal bias was his observation that, 'upon utter dislike, the husband divorces—which liberty no doubt they received first with their religion from the Greek Church, and the imperial laws.' In one respect, then, the barbaric Russians were more civilized than the British.

*A Brief History of Moscovia* was to Milton an 'essay', composed 'with no cursory pains' and bringing its author 'some delight'. Encouraged, he turned next to a history of his own country, from its remotest beginnings down to his own troubled times.[69] His intention was to include no more of ecclesiastical history 'than what mixes aptly with civil affairs' (143). Realizing that it was wearisome enough to read of 'so many names of kings one after another, acting little more than mute persons in a scene', he decided that it would be inexcusable to insert 'the long bead-roll of archbishops, bishops, abbots, abbesses, and their doings, neither to religion profitable, nor to morality'. Such he would gladly leave to those 'who have a mind to write the ecclesiastical matters of those ages'. Furthermore, he determined, in so far as it was possible, not 'to wrinkle the smoothness of history with rugged names of places unknown' (185). Offering a 'view of what with reason can be relied on for truth' (140), he meant to avoid irrelevant lists and genealogies, which would 'encumber the story with a sort of barbarous names, to little purpose' (139). Instead, he would 'endeavour that which hitherto hath been needed most: with plain and lightsome brevity to relate well and orderly things worth the noting, so as may best instruct and benefit them that read' (3). His aim, in other words, was what it had been in the *Brief History of Moscovia*, although now he was working with a great mass of source material. Thanks to his reading programme of 1639–41, much of it was already familiar to him.

Milton's personal interpretation of British history, although coloured by admiration for various individuals and for certain qualities manifested by his countrymen in ages past, was nevertheless pessimistic on the whole. He was proud of the fact that the ancient Britons were in courage and resourcefulness 'not inferior to the Romans' (49); disparaging many of the Roman 'triumphs', he emphasized 'the native and the naked British valour', the 'downright manhood' (55), which defended a homeland 'never thoroughly subdued or all at once in subjection' (101) during 462 years of conquest. On the other hand, these same Britons, who 'forgot not to show some manhood' (139), were a barbaric people fortunately beaten 'into some civility' by the Romans (51); and with the end of the Roman Empire there 'fell also what before in this western world was chiefly Roman—learning, valour, eloquence, history, civility, and even language itself' (101). Quite apart from this bias, Milton took a cynical and disillusioned view of the national character, a view unquestionably influenced by the confusion of his own times and the general atmosphere of pessimism in 1648:

> Britain (to speak a truth not oft spoken), as it is a land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in war, so is it naturally not over-fertile of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting only on their mother wit as most do, and consider[ing] not that civility, prudence, love of the public, more than of money or vain honour, are to this soil in a manner outlandish—grow not here but in minds well implanted with solid and elaborate breeding; too impolitic else and too crude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and virtue either of executing or understanding true civil government; valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field, but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise, in good or bad success alike unteachable. For the sun, which we want, ripens wits as well as fruits; and as wine and oil are imported to us from abroad, so must ripe understanding and many civil virtues be imported into our minds from foreign writings and examples of best ages. We shall else miscarry still, and come short in the attempt of any great enterprise. [324-5]

This was the lesson of British history as he understood it.

As he had written to Hartlib in 1644, virtuous education for a future statesman was a thing 'for the want whereof this nation perishes'. He saw more clearly than ever, now, the tragic need for English minds 'well implanted with solid and elaborate breeding', blessed with 'ripe understanding and many civil virtues' imported from abroad. In composing the *History* from such a point of view, Milton was frequently reminded of ancient parallels to modern ills, and he introduced them wherever possible, often with special comment. When the Saxons were converted to a Christianity tainted with 'rank superstition' (145), their churchmen quickly 'stepped up into fellowship of pomp with kings' (146). When a synod was called to discuss the disturbing effect of Arian doctrines, it suggested to Milton 'the Presbyters of our age, who like well to sit in Assembly on the public stipend' (94). After the Britons were rid of their Roman conquerors, 'the peace they enjoyed, by ill using it, proved more destructive to them than war' (133). Peace always earns 'as ill a name as war' (73) if accompanied by corruption, excessive taxation, extortion, and interference of the military in politics. Under the Romans, whom Milton so much admired, peace had brought a disastrous imitation of fashions conducive to national weakness—'materials of vice and voluptuous life, proud buildings, baths, and the elegance of banqueting, which the foolisher sort called civility, but was indeed a secret art to prepare them for bondage' (74). Thus, after the Romans were gone, Britons were unprepared for the challenges of liberty, and confusion followed.

The first chapter of the *History*, concerned solely with pre-Roman times, offered scant opportunity for such didactic interpretation, and necessitated, moreover, a sweeping exception to Milton's avowed purposes in writing. He had to begin with the frank admission that, 'of British affairs from the first peopling of the island to the coming of Julius Caesar, nothing certain either by tradition, history, or ancient fame hath hitherto been left us. That which we have of oldest seeming, hath by the greater part of judicious antiquaries been long rejected for a modern fable.' Still, realizing that 'oft times relations heretofore accounted fabulous have been after found to contain in them many footsteps and reliques of something true' (2), he decided to give a coherent account of the old stories, if only for the benefit of 'English poets and rhetoricians, who by their art will know how to use them judiciously.' In this mood, therefore, always sceptically and sometimes with obvious amusement, he opened 'the smooth course of history' with the offspring of Gomer the eldest son of Japhet, who after the Flood 'were the first that peopled all these west and northern climes'—or so it was 'generally believed' (3). He did not profess to accept 'Brutus and the whole Trojan pretence' (6), yet he told the ancient tale at some length, adding only his conviction that 'to examine these things with diligence were but to confute the fables of Britain with the fables of Greece or Italy' (8). As for the tales of subsequent kings, he thought it wise to avoid 'too strict an incredulity'. He accepted as at least 'the due and proper subject of story' whatever was related by such ancient writers as Geoffrey of Monmouth, 'so far as keeps aloof from impossible and absurd' (6). He began with the Flood, but he tried not to go 'against the stream of History' (25).

Milton's criteria for this first chapter were, of course, difficult to apply, and the result was an amusing hodgepodge of legendary material. He laughed at the testimony of 'fabulous and counterfeit authors', but surrendered often to the appeal of a story 'too absurd and too unconscionably gross' to be believed (4), yet too entertaining to be omitted. He begged leave to include the account of a wrestling match between Corineus and the giant Goëmagog—'a grand fable, though dignified by our best poets' (14).[70] After branding one legend an 'outlandish figment', he would then recount another 'perhaps as wide from truth' (4), but fascinating to him. He noted that several wild tales had been invented to account for the name Albion; he told the story of Gwendolyn's revenge upon Sabra, which gave a name to the river Sabrina, or Severn; but he also expressed his doubts concerning the antiquity of various names in stories supposedly ancient. Without glancing at Shakespeare's play he related the full story of King Lear and his daughters. He quoted some of Spenser's lines on Greenshield, and, encountering some surprisingly good Latin verses in Gildas, he offered his own translation, wondering if perhaps Joseph of Exeter, 'the only smooth poet of those times, befriended him' (12). For most of his material he cited his authorities marginally, trying, in general, to avoid 'controversies and quotations' (3), or long debate on the probabilities of opinions stated. Concluding his narrative of the pre-Roman times, he declared simply:

> Thus far, though leaning only on the credit of Geoffrey Monmouth and his assertors, I yet for the specified causes have thought it not beneath my purpose to relate what I found. Whereto I neither oblige the belief of other person nor over-hastily subscribe mine own. Nor have I stood with others computing or collating years and chronologies, lest I should be vainly curious about the time and circumstance of things whereof the substance is so much in doubt. By this time, like one who had set out on his way by night and travelled through a region of smooth or idle dreams, our History now arrives on the confines where daylight and truth meet us with a clear dawn, representing to our view, though at a far distance, true colours and shapes. [30–31]

In his second chapter, the story of the Roman Conquest, Milton felt that he was dealing with 'a story of much truth, and for the first hundred years and somewhat more, collected without much labour' (32) from the Commentaries of Caesar and a variety of other prudent authors. Indeed, the tale had already been so well told that, 'were it not for leaving an unsightly gap so near to the beginning, I should have judged this labour, wherein so little seems to be required above transcription, almost superfluous. Notwithstanding, since I must through it, if aught by diligence may be added or omitted, or by other disposing may be more explained, . . . I shall assay' (33–34). Beginning, then, with the arrival of the Romans in Britain, Milton wove a rich but straightforward narrative, omitting 'many trivial discourses' (49) of Caesar's campaigns, omitting also whatever he considered 'too palpably untrue to be worth rehearsing in the midst of truth' (56). When he encountered suspicious details in his sources (the alleged ignorance of Britain in Gallia, for example), he declared his scepticism. Noting that some ancient writers had cast doubt on Caesar's victories, Milton asserted 'that in plain terms he fled from hence' (48). He could reject, in this chapter, 'the fabling zeal of some idle fancies' (92), and he found space, instead, for enthusiastic descriptions of old battles, with their 'gory mixture of slaughter' (69). He dwelt in detail on ancient methods of warfare; he described, too, the towns, customs, tactics, and dress of Britons of old: 'Clothing they had none, but what the skins of beasts afforded them, and that not always; yet gallantry they had, painting their own skins with several portraitures of beast, bird, or flower—a vanity which hath not yet left us, removed only from the skin to the skirt, behung now with as many coloured ribands and geegaws' (50).

Occasionally, to embellish his narrative, Milton quoted reported speeches, like the noble exhortation of Caractacus: 'This is the day, this the field, either to defend our liberty, or to die free' (58–59). In general, however, he preserved a cautious attitude toward such material: 'I affect not set speeches in a history, unless known for certain to have been so spoken in effect as they are written, nor then unless worth rehearsal; and to invent such, though eloquently, as some historians have done, is an abuse of posterity, raising in them that read other conceptions of those times and persons than were true. Much less, therefore, do I purpose here or elsewhere to copy out tedious orations without decorum, though in their authors composed ready to my hand' (68). As the writing progressed, he developed careful standards of selectivity.

Milton did not hesitate to show his admiration for such good kings as Gorbonian, 'than whom a juster man lived not in his age' (27), or for such renowned warriors as Cassibelan and Caractacus, whose exploits were 'full of magnanimity, soberness, and martial skill' (68). On the other hand, he remarked the 'haughty craft which the Romans used to make kings also the servile agents of enslaving others' (58); and he wrote with devastating candour whenever he felt that the ancient Britons 'plainly manifested themselves to be right barbarians' (69). There were, he knew, some authors 'unworthily called historians' who put patriotism ahead of honesty. 'The fond zeal of praising their nations above truth hath so far transported them that, where they find nothing faithfully to relate, they fall confidently to invent what they think may either best set off their history or magnify their country' (107). Milton, however, was determined to write another sort of history, one that would redound to the glory of God 'and the good of the British nation' (3).

In his third chapter, which dealt with the period of disintegration following the Roman Conquest, he found it necessary to proceed with unusual scepticism:

> Henceforth we are to steer by another sort of authors, near enough to the things they write, as in their own country, if that would serve; in time not much belated, some of equal age; in expression barbarous; and to say how judicious, I suspend a while. This we must expect, in civil matters to find them dubious relaters, and still to the best advantage of what they term Holy Church, meaning indeed themselves; in most other matters of religion, blind, astonished, and struck with superstition as with a planet; in one word—*Monks*. Yet these guides, where can be had no better, must be followed; in gross, it may be true enough; in circumstance, each man as his judgement gives him may reserve his faith or bestow it. [101–2]

The problem was one of following the 'surest authors' (123) and 'truer stories' (113), of collecting 'what there is of certainty with circumstance of time and place to be found registered' (127). In this chapter, for example, Milton had to deal with a subject which, less than a decade before, he had fondly hoped to use in an epic poem. The wars of King Arthur, he had since realized, were 'more renowned in songs and romances than in true stories' (123). The many 'unlikelihoods of Arthur's reign and great achievements' (131) had persuaded him to alter his poetic plans, and now, in his *History*, he felt impelled to state simply: 'Who Arthur was, and whether ever any such reigned in Britain, hath been doubted heretofore, and may again with good reason' (127-8). 'He who can accept of legends for good story may quickly swell a volume with trash, and had need be furnished with two only necessaries, leisure and belief' (128). The Arthurian legends had lost their pertinency for Milton, but he was still concerned enough to discuss the sources of 'such uncertainties' (131) at considerable length, making clear the grounds of his personal disbelief.

Writing the third chapter became important to Milton for another reason: he saw in the demoralized state of Britain after the Roman Conquest an edifying parallel to the corruption and confusion which menaced a modern England, so recently freed of tyrannical monarch and tyrannical Church.

> This third book, having to tell of accidents as various and exemplary as the intermission or change of government hath anywhere brought forth, may deserve attention more than common, and repay it with like benefit to them who can judiciously read. Considering especially that the late civil broils had cast us into a condition not much unlike to what the Britons then were in, when the imperial jurisdiction departing hence left them to the sway of their own councils, which times by comparing seriously with these later, and that confused anarchy with this inter-reign, we may be able from two such remarkable turns of state, producing like events among us, to raise a knowledge of ourselves both great and weighty, by judging hence what kind of men the Britons generally are in matters of so high enterprise, how by nature, industry, or custom fitted to attempt or undergo matters of so main consequence. For if it be a high point of wisdom in every private man, much more is it in a nation *to know itself*, rather than, puffed up with vulgar flatteries and encomiums, for want of self-knowledge to enterprise rashly and come off miserably in great undertakings. [103]

That England had 'come off miserably' by 1648 seemed obvious to Milton, and the *reason* for the failure lay, as once before, in a people 'through long subjection servile in mind' (103). What had happened after the Conquest?

> Although at first greedy of change, and to be thought the leading nation to freedom from the Empire, they seemed a while to bestir them with a show of diligence in their new affairs, some secretly aspiring to rule, others adoring the name of liberty, yet so soon as they felt by proof the weight of what it was to govern well themselves, and what was wanting within them—not stomach or the love of licence, but the wisdom, the virtue, the labour, to use and maintain true liberty—they soon remitted their heat, and shrunk more wretchedly under the burden of their own liberty than before under a foreign yoke. [104]

It was a bitter precedent to swallow, but profiting little from history, England had repeated it.

In the former age the chief evil, according to Gildas, 'was the hatred of truth and all such as durst appear to vindicate and maintain it; against them, as against the only disturbers, all the malice of the land was bent.' Milton himself had suffered this malice, this hatred of truth; he had encountered, too, a clergy 'swollen with pride and wilfulness, full of contention, full of envy, indiscreet, incompetent judges to determine what in the practice of life is good or evil, what lawful or unlawful' (111). Such a 'vicious and corrupt' clergy, said Gildas, had weakened England before.

Small wonder that Britons then had been unable to cope with the Picts and the Scots; small wonder that they had turned ignobly for protection to the fierce Saxons, 'a barbarous and heathen nation, famous for nothing else but robberies and cruelties done to all their neighbours' (113). 'So much do men through impatience count ever that the heaviest which they bear at present, and, to remove the evil which they suffer, care not to pull on a greater, as if variety and change in evil also were acceptable—or whether it be that men, in the despair of better, imagine fondly a kind of refuge from one misery to another' (114). Whatever the rationalizations of the Britons, 'sinister Fate had now blinded them for destruction' (115). Milton did not point the parallel, but there are lines in *Samson Agonistes* which express a similar attitude toward the debauched Philistines:

> Among them He a spirit of frenzy sent,
> Who hurt their minds,
> And urged them on with mad desire
> To call in haste for their destroyer;
> They only set on sport and play
> Unwittingly importuned
> Their own destruction to come speedy upon them.
> So fond are mortal men
> Fallen into wrath divine,
> As their own ruin on themselves to invite,
> Insensate left, or to sense reprobate,
> And with blindness internal struck. [1675–86]

In Milton's pessimistic view, contemporary England, debauched by the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly, also faced 'confusion in the end' (325).

He insisted upon the parallel in a lengthy digression[71] devoted to recent events:

> Because the gaining or losing of liberty is the greatest change to better or to worse that may befall a nation under civil government, and so discovers, as nothing more, what degree of understanding or capacity, what disposition to justice and civility there is among them, I suppose it will be many ways profitable . . . to consider what might be the reason . . . why the Britons, having such a smooth occasion given them to free themselves as ages have not afforded, such a manumission as never subjects had a fairer, should let it pass through them as a cordial medicine through a dying man, without the least effect of sense or natural

> vigour. And no less to purpose if not more usefully to us it may withal be inquired, since God after twelve ages and more had drawn so near a parallel between their state and ours in the late commotions, why they who had the chief management therein . . . were not found able after so many years doing and undoing to hit so much as into any good and laudable way that might show us hopes of a just and well amended commonwealth to come. . . . Of these who swayed most in the late troubles, few words as to this point may suffice. They had armies, leaders, and successes to their wish, but to make use of so great advantages was not their skill. . . . [Other causes brought] these of late after many labours, much bloodshed, and vast expense, to ridiculous frustration . . . [317-19]

The 'other causes' were selfishness and greed, manifested in political corruption and clerical tyranny. High hopes for reform had been baffled by leaders with the souls of petty tradesmen, grasping for power.

> For a Parliament being called and, as was thought, many things to redress, the people with great courage and expectation to be now eased of what discontented them, chose to their behoof in Parliament such as they thought best affected to the public good—and some, indeed, men of wisdom and integrity. The rest, and to be sure the greatest part, whom wealth and ample possessions or bold and active ambition rather than merit had commended to the same place, when once the superficial zeal and popular fumes that acted their new magistry were cooled and spent in them, straight every one betook himself, setting the commonwealth behind and his private ends before, to do as his own profit or ambition led him. Then was justice delayed, and soon after denied; spite and favour determined all; hence faction, then treachery, both at home and in the field; everywhere wrong and oppression, foul and dishonest things committed daily, or maintained in secret or in open. Some who had been called from shops and warehouses without other merit to sit in supreme councils and committees, as their breeding was, fell to huckster the commonwealth . . . [319-20]

As a cultivated individual Milton deplored the mean spirit of England's new governors. As a frugal citizen he chafed under the new burden of taxation, more oppressive by far than anything suffered under monarchy. The votes and ordinances of the Long Parliament, 'which men looked should have contained the repealing of bad laws and the immediate constitution of better, resounded with nothing else but new impositions, taxes, excises, yearly, monthly, weekly—not to reckon the offices, gifts, and preferments bestowed and shared among themselves' (320). Supposedly popular government was bleeding the people white.

From the start of the civil war, the Parliament and its armies had enjoyed a financial advantage which the Royalist forces never knew. Parliament could not only use against the King the normal revenues which he had once received; it could also raise loans from wealthy London merchants, and could establish taxes in its own right. Suddenly anxious to control rather than to support its sovereign, Parliament widened the whole basis of taxation, and, thanks to the imagination of men like Pym, it bridged the gap between medieval and what we know as modern finance. An excise tax was introduced, first on the sale of food and drink, eventually on the sale of most articles in general demand. Direct taxation, which had formerly consisted of a fixed levy on each district in England, regardless of rising values, was abandoned in favour of monthly assessments, with a total amount determined each month by Parliament in the light of current military needs. These assessments were managed by County Committees, politically influential groups which rarely hesitated to punish neutrals and suspected Royalists. The elaborate organization necessitated by the new financial methods produced, perhaps inevitably, corruption on an appalling scale.

Such were some of the facts in the back of Milton's mind as he penned his indictment of the Long Parliament. He was thinking, too, of what had happened to persons like himself, who had supported the Government loyally, but who had been seriously hindered in their efforts to collect their just debts from Royalist debtors. Parliament had been so eager to lay the burden of the war on the property of the conquered that it had ignored the rights of the faithful. Not only had property been confiscated wherever the parliamentary armies had advanced; all those who had aided the King had been forced to compound for their 'delinquency' by huge fines, varying from a sixth to half of the value of their estates. As a consequence, many a loyal citizen had joined the tearful wives of Royalist gentry in endless petitions to the all-powerful London committeemen. As Milton expressed it, those 'ever faithfulest' to the Parliament,

> slighted soon after and quite bereaved of their just debts by greedy sequestration, were tossed up and down after miserable attendance from one committee to another with petitions in their hands, yet either missed the obtaining of their suit, or, if it were at length granted by their orders (mere shame and reason oft times extorting from them at least a show of justice), yet by their sequestrators and sub-committees abroad, men for the most part of insatiable hands and noted disloyalty, those orders were commonly disobeyed—which for certain durst not have been without secret compliance, if not compact, with some superiors able to bear them out. Thus were their friends confiscate in their enemies, while they forfeited their debtors to the 'state' (as they called it, but indeed to the ravening seizure of innumerable thieves in office!), yet were withal no less burdened in all extraordinary assessments and oppressions than [those] whom they took to be disaffected. [320–1]

It was becoming obvious from such mischiefs and misdemeanours that England had substituted one tyranny for another, and that the new tyrant, having shrewdly used his opportunity, was hostile to further change.

> Besides the sweetness of bribery and other gain, with the love of rule, their own guiltiness and the dreaded name of Just Account, which the people had long called for, discovered plainly that there were of their own number who secretly contrived and fomented those troubles and combustions in the land which openly they sat to remedy, and would continually find such work as should keep them

> from ever being brought to the terrible stand of laying down their authority for lack of new business, or not drawing it out to any length of time . . .

The end of such a conspiracy, in Milton's grim judgement, could only be 'the necessary ruin of a whole nation' (321).

When he wrote these words, he seems not to have anticipated such a possibility as the execution of the King or a stirring adventure in republican government. He was conscious rather of England's need for enlightened leadership. His own minor efforts to direct public thinking had proved abortive, and his conception of a literary ministry prohibited his seeking any office. Six years of bloodshed and dissension had demoralized the country, which yearned for peace but lacked the unity of purpose to secure it. Fresh troubles arose before old problems could be solved; in April of 1648, for example, while Milton had turned to translation of the Psalms for comfort, new rebellions of Royalist forces had raised 'their hydra heads'. In May these insurrections increased. General Fairfax succeeded in driving the Royalists of Kent and Essex into Colchester, and on 12 June he laid siege to the city. Early in July the Scots—the 'false North'—invaded England, violating the Solemn League and Covenant to repair the once-broken wings of rebellion. They were crushed by Cromwell at the battle of Preston, on 17 August, and ten days later Fairfax received the surrender of Colchester. Peace was again restored, and Milton, dropping whatever he was then working on, was prompted to address the victorious commander-in-chief in a sonnet of urgent tribute:

> Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings,
> Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,
> And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,
> And rumours loud that daunt remotest kings,
> Thy firm, unshaken virtue ever brings
> Victory home, though new rebellions raise
> Their hydra heads, and the false North displays
> Her broken League to imp their serpent wings . . .

Fairfax had proved himself to be, not only a great military leader, but a man of rare integrity—the kind of man whom England sorely lacked in political affairs. Although he was three years younger than Milton, the modest, pipe-smoking general had a unique opportunity to show himself something more than a brilliant soldier, if only he would exert his great prestige in much-needed statesmanship, ridding the land of all the political corruption which had sapped the strength of reformation:

> O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand:
> For what can war but endless war still breed,
> Till Truth and Right from violence be freed
> And Public Faith cleared from the shameful brand
> Of Public Fraud? In vain doth valour bleed
> While avarice and rapine share the land.

In his *History of Britain* Milton expressed it thus: 'That faith which ought to be kept as sacred and inviolable as anything holy, the Public Faith, after infinite sums received and all the wealth of the Church, not better employed, but swallowed up into a private gulf, was not ere long ashamed to confess bankrupt' (321). The situation called for drastic remedy. And Milton's sonnet was one which might have changed the history of England, and of the world—had its plea been heeded, had Fairfax accepted the role of leadership that Cromwell finally played. But Fairfax had other plans; he would soon be cultivating his famous garden, and leaving the management of events to perhaps less able men.[72]

In the second part of his digression on the lessons of British history, Milton wrote with disgust of the Westminster Assembly of Divines and the low state of the Church. To reform religion a certain number of clergymen had been called together,

> neither chosen by any rule or custom ecclesiastical, nor eminent for either piety or knowledge above others left out; only as each member of Parliament in his private fancy thought fit, so elected one by one. The most of them were such as had preached and cried down with great show of zeal the avarice and pluralities of bishops and prelates, that one cure of souls was a full employment for one spiritual pastor how able soever, if not a charge rather above human strength. Yet these conscientious men, ere any part of the work for which they came together (and that on the public salary!), wanted not impudence, to the ignominy and scandal of their pastorlike profession and especially of their boasted reformation, to seize into their hands or not unwillingly to accept (besides one, sometimes two or more, of the best livings) collegiate masterships in the university, rich lectures in the City, setting sail to all winds that might blow gain into their covetous bosoms. . . . And yet the main doctrine for which they took such pay, and insisted upon with more vehemence than gospel, was but to tell us, in effect, that their doctrine was worth nothing and the spiritual power of their ministry less available than bodily compulsion—persuading the magistrate to use it as a stronger means to subdue and bring in conscience than evangelic persuasion. . . . their intents were clear to be no other than to have set up a spiritual tyranny by a secular power, to the advancing of their own authority above the magistrate . . . there hath not been a more ignominious and mortal wound to faith, to piety, nor more cause of blaspheming given to the enemies of God and of truth, since the first preaching of reformation . . . [321–3]

From such power-hungry pastors, 'persecutors more than lovers of the truth', Milton expected nothing but grief.

They were not only 'like in many things whereof they had accused their predecessors' (323); their lack of spiritual guidance, like that of the prelates before them, had 'unfitted also the people, now grown worse and more disordinate, to receive or to digest any liberty at all' (324). History taught that 'liberty sought out of season in a corrupt and degenerate age brought Rome itself into further slavery. For liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by just and virtuous men; to bad and dissolute it becomes a mischief unwieldy in their own hands. Neither is it completely given, but by them who have the happy skill to know what is grievance and unjust to a people, and how to remove it wisely, that good men may enjoy the freedom which they merit and the bad the curb which they need' (324). The wisdom 'to know these exquisite proportions' had 'surmounted far the principles of narrow politicians' in the Parliament, where, 'from the chapman to the retailer, many whose ignorance was more audacious than the rest were admitted with all their sordid rudiments to bear no mean sway'. The same lack of fitness marred the ministry. England needed 'men more than vulgar, bred up (as few of them were) in the knowledge of ancient and illustrious deeds, invincible against money and vain titles, impartial to friendships and relations' (325). But such men (like General Fairfax, presumably) were, to the tired and fading eyes of Milton in 1648, not only few in number; they were hardly visible in the dark prospect of the nation's downfall.

The gloomy historian continued his writing. He damned Geoffrey of Monmouth for 'the simple fraud' of certain stories (113); he paraphrased Gildas at length on the evils of kings and clergy in bygone days; he commented severely on the tendency of some authors to give imaginary descriptions of battles: 'the age whereof we now write hath had the ill hap, more than any since the first fabulous times, to be surcharged with all the idle fancies of posterity' (127). Completing his third chapter, which had inspired the topical digression (and which was probably penned in the autumn of 1648), he moved into the fourth, the style and organization of which betray a flagging energy and restlessness. In one place, sensitive to the tediousness of his narrative, he skipped six years; in another, after mentioning a long story, he merely named its source, 'where I leave it to be sought by such as are more credulous than I wish my readers' (194). Having to report the killing of two dukes, with no apparent reason for a quarrel, he declared: 'Such bickerings to recount, met often in these our writers, what more worth is it than to chronicle the wars of kites or crows, flocking and fighting in the air?' (191). He was tired, and he confessed his annoyance with the old annals, 'so different they often are one from another, both in timing and in naming' (190). Nevertheless, he persisted, and by mid March 1649 had almost finished the fourth chapter, bringing the history down to the time of Ethelbald (and the end of Bede's account).[73]

This represented but a fragment of his total design. But his labours had taught him much about the writing of history; indeed, his attitude had changed as the work had progressed. When he began, he had regarded history as storytelling in a set style; since the materials of British history were already easily available, though in bulky volumes, a brief compilation—if somewhat longer than the *Brief History of Moscovia*—was what seemed to be needed. Writing the first chapter he had been sceptical of everything, yet his sensitivity to the poetic uses of the early legends, sharpened by his former intention of embodying some of them in an epic, had kept him from ignoring them. He knew them to be fictitious, but found them still attractive, and his narrative was lengthened accordingly. Similarly, when he reached later chapters, stories which he had once considered as subjects for tragedies—Edgar's marriage with Elfrida, the vision of King Edwin, Athelstan's murder of his brother, and the tale of Queen Eadburga for example—he treated occasionally in fascinated detail. At the same time he gradually became interested in comparing the divergent accounts of 'ancientest and best authors'. In the first chapter, noting that Holinshed and Stow completely accepted the Brutus legend, whereas Speed gave a detailed argument against it, Milton expressed his personal scepticism, warned his readers, and related much of the legend nevertheless. He also declared himself sceptical of a number of popular and widely accepted beliefs: of England's conversion to Christianity under King Lucius (accepted by Holinshed, Stow, Speed, Archbishop Parker, and Cardinal Pole), of the British descent of Constantine the Great, of the Arthurian story. In discussing the last, he wrote like a scientific historian, cutting through glib and gullible echoes in search for sound evidence. His third and fourth chapters are conspicuously more than a compilation from standard historians; they abound in critical examination of the original sources then available. As this spirit of scholarly inquiry grew upon him, he called attention to anachronisms and discrepancies, discussed problems in chronology, unmasked borrowed or invented interpolations, and, presenting different versions of the same story, concluded by announcing a considered preference. All this combined, of course, to lengthen the work, and what had begun as a Brief History of Britain, a companion-piece to the *Moscovia*, grew into an ambitious undertaking that he was never to live to finish.[74]

Milton's scholarly scepticism was aggravated, at times, by his Protestant bias. He did not share the enthusiasm for monastic antiquities exhibited by Camden, Dugdale, and so many others of his contemporaries. Viewing with disgust the charming old tales of martyrs and miracles which studded the pages of his sources, he rejected them all as unsuitable material. He did, however, permit himself a few contemptuous comments on the cloistered life, particularly as affected by kings, on the absurdities of ecclesiastical controversy, and on the ridiculous paraphernalia of popish superstition. In such he found reasons for national deterioration; and it became his thesis that each successive conquest of Britain was God's just punishment, an evidence of 'divine retaliation'. He judged in the spirit of Judges, and of *Samson Agonistes*. 'When God hath decreed servitude on a sinful nation, fitted by their own vices for no condition but servile, all estates of government are alike unable to avoid it.'[75]

Another bias, sometimes disturbing to modern readers who know more about Milton's poetry than about his age, was the attitude expressed in several passages about women in government. There is praise of women in the *History*: Claudia Rufina, daughter of a Briton and wife of a Roman senator, was 'famous by the verse of Martial for beauty, wit, and learning' (81); Lady Godiva was 'a woman of great praise'; and Queen Edith, daughter of Earl Godwin, was 'commended much for beauty, modesty, and, beyond what is requisite in a woman, learning.'[76] On the other hand, Milton could not believe, with Holinshed, that Queen Martia was responsible for the laws attributed to her, 'for laws are masculine births'. She must have had wise counsel, he rationalized; 'else nothing more awry from the law of God and nature than that a woman should give laws to men' (26). One of the sources of Milton's bias he revealed in his story of Caractacus taken captive to Rome and brought before Empress Agrippina —'a new and disdained sight to the manly eyes of Romans, a woman sitting public in her female pride among ensigns and armed cohorts' (60). In Britain, he emphasized, Queen Secburga was driven out by nobles 'disdaining female government' (170), and the subjects of Queen Cartismandua resented 'the uncomeliness of their subjection to the monarchy of a woman, a piece of manhood not every day to be found among Britons' (62). Quendrid's 'female ambition aspiring to the crown' resulted in the murder of a child entrusted to her care (194).

Confirmed in the common hierarchal notion of woman's natural inferiority, Milton was most outraged when he came to the tale of Boadicea, the warrior-queen, whom most previous historians had chosen to treat as a national heroine. Dion Cassius and Tacitus had even made her say that with the Britons it was usual for a woman to be their leader. Meeting this speech in both Holinshed and Speed, Milton decided that it must derive from an attempt by foreigners to make Britons appear more barbaric than they actually were. He not only rejected the speech, but characterized Boadicea as a virago and a distracted female, meddling in affairs out of her proper sphere.

Other very personal opinions and prejudices are interspersed throughout the *History*. Milton did not again attack Episcopacy, for the bishops had been abolished and no one anticipated the revival of prelacy.[77] His target, in all his comments upon the clergy, was Presbyterianism. Reporting Bede's judgement of Ireland—'a harmless nation and ever friendly to the English'—he added, wryly, 'in both which they seem to have left a posterity much unlike them at this day' (174). 'The giddy favour of a mutining rout', he wrote, 'is as dangerous as their fury' (99). Providence, he said in another passage, tries great virtue, 'to make it more illustrious' (28). He compared polygamy favourably with one of the ancient vices of his countrymen: 'whereas other nations used a liberty not unnatural, for one man to have many wives, the Britons, altogether as licentious but more absurd and preposterous in their licence, had one or many wives in common among ten or twelve husbands' (87).

The style of the *History*, although sometimes poetic, is predominantly simple and sententiously concise. Milton's model was Sallust, whom he preferred to all other Latin historians. He imitated his master in striving for pregnant phrases—the Britons 'with a stern compassion' (79) killed their wives and children to save them from the Romans—and he was successful, on the whole, in his attempt to combine brevity with an impressive and dignified manner. Believing that great deeds usually found great relaters, he was not surprised to discover that the poorest records which he had to consult were invariably of the most dissolute periods.

> 'Tis true that in obscurest times, by shallow and unskillful writers, the indistinct noise of many battles and devastations, of many kingdoms over-run and lost, hath come to our ears. For what wonder if in all ages, ambition and the love of rapine hath stirred up greedy and violent men to bold attempts in wasting and ruining wars, which to posterity have left the work of wild beasts and destroyers, rather than the deeds and monuments of men and conquerors. . . . When the esteem of science and liberal study waxes low in the commonwealth, we may presume that also there all civil virtue and worthy action is grown as low to a decline; and then eloquence, as it were consorted in the same destiny, with the decrease and fall of virtue corrupts also and fades—at least resigns her office of relating to illiterate and frivolous historians, such as the persons themselves both deserve and are best pleased with, whilst they want either the understanding to choose better or the innocence to dare invite the examining and searching style of an intelligent and faithful writer to the survey of their unsound exploits, better befriended by obscurity than fame. [32–33]

Having thus expressed his conviction, Milton may have reconsidered his original purpose of bringing the *History* down to his own discouraging times.

The closing months of 1648 were extremely distracting. On Wednesday, 25 October (another fast day), at about six o'clock in the morning, Milton's second child, another daughter, was born. On 7 November, in the church of St. Giles in the Fields, she was baptized Mary, after her mother.[78] During this same month of October, thus disturbing to domestic calm, the Parliamentarian army began agitation for the punishment of King Charles. Early in December the Presbyterian membership was forcefully purged from Parliament, and before December had run its course, the rump assembly had resolved to bring their monarch to trial. History was being made, not written, and observing the new emphasis of actual events, Milton realized that many of his ideas again needed revision.

Almost four years had elapsed since he had penned his final divorce pamphlet. There had been time enough in which to compose an epic or complete a tragedy, time enough to fulfil the promises made so optimistically in the days following the Italian journey. There had been time—but circumstances had proved hostile; tasks had become more complicated than they had seemed; life itself had interfered. The untroubled leisure of the Hammersmith and Horton days had not been an unmixed blessing, for Milton had since spent the years of his early maturity in learning how to adjust himself—to people, to politics, to marriage and parenthood, to the disturbing fact of his fading eyesight. On 9 December 1648 he became forty. His accomplishments to date seemed slight indeed; his literary ministry had been groping and ineffectual.

At forty there were resolutions to be made, decisions to be reached. Milton, and England, stood on the threshold of dangerous adventuring. A king was about to be tried for his life. In his *History* Milton had noted Dunwallo as 'the first in Britain that wore a crown of gold' (23), and in a subsequent passage he had called 'love of a crown' a thing 'that so often dazzles and vitiates mortal men, for which thousands of nearest blood have destroyed each other' (28). As he wrote the concluding paragraph of the fourth chapter of the *History*, parallels with his own age were still occurring to him. The Northumbrian kingdom, he noted, had 'fallen to shivers', its 'kings one after another so often slain by the people, no man daring, though never so ambitious, to take up the sceptre which many had found so hot'. Regicide was, he remarked parenthetically—in a sally worthy of Sallust—'the only effectual cure of ambition that I have read' (195).

## PART FOUR

# PUBLIC SERVICE

# 10. Secretaryship, 1649–1652

UNCOMPREHENDED forces of gravity, released by an anonymous figure in a black mask, plunged England sharply into a Republic. All tradition, all precedent, all nerve-links with the reassuring past were severed with the royal head of Charles. The great crowd that had gathered outside Whitehall, eyes focused on the black-draped scaffold, greeted the falling axe with a universal and involuntary groan. It was the bleak afternoon of Tuesday, 30 January 1649.

Milton was probably there. As much as any man he was fascinated by the unfolding of history; and unlike most of his countrymen he was convinced that bloody justice upon the King was a stroke both patriotic and pious. Standing among the multitude in the open street, straining with his one good eye to recognize the various actors in the brief drama, he could have quoted, on demand, impressive warrant for regicide from either Scripture or the classics. The scaffold stood in front of the new Banqueting Hall which Inigo Jones had built, and it was completely surrounded by companies of foot and horse. (*In the Old Testament there were the stories of Ehud and Eglon, Samuel and Agag, Jehu and Jehoram.*) On the platform, near Charles, were Bishop Juxon, Colonel Hacker, some other officers, and the men in the black masks. The King was obviously making a farewell speech, glancing occasionally at a piece of paper in his hand; but it was impossible to hear him. (*Seneca had written:* '*There can be slain / No sacrifice to God more acceptable / Than an unjust and wicked king.*') The speech ended, Charles took a white satin cap from Juxon, put it on, and pushed his reddish brown hair all within it. Removing his cloak and the insignia of the Order of the Garter, he knelt down and put his neck on the block. (*Did not all history manifest that the people possess a natural right to depose kings and punish tyrants? Even the heathen king Demophoon, in Euripides, had declared himself liable, if he did unjustly, to suffer justly.*) The kneeling figure on the scaffold stretched out his arms, and there was a jar, as the axe fell. If Milton shuddered, he could remind himself, walking briskly back to High Holborn, that it was a raw January day.

He had work to do. The temper of the people was disturbing. It was bad enough that ordinary men quailed before the dazzling future which their own hands had laid bare. But among the populace, fomenting doubt, spreading disorder, were the Presbyterian clergy, those covetous and hypocritical creatures who had begun the war against the King, but who now, denied the powers of the bishops they had dethroned, were loud in pious protest. Their influence threatened the new Republic at the very moment of its birth. Popular revulsion was more than a possibility. It already existed; it could be felt in the crowd at the King's execution. If it became organized, if it found leaders, if it roused itself from the shock to reawakened loyalty, nothing could withstand it. The dramatic events of the past two months had been directed by a handful of resolute men. In Milton's view these men had worked for the good of the whole people, but the people had not authorized them to act, and the people, incited by the Presbyterians, might suddenly reject their champions. The moment called for effective propaganda, a clear and convincing defence of regicide. Even before the grim afternoon of 30 January, Milton had interrupted his work on the *History of Britain* and had busied himself with an appropriate statement. Stirred once more by the unprecedented opportunities of his age, he had decided to reappear in the stormy arena of pamphlet controversy.

The past two months had been breathtaking. December had begun urgently, with the army marching into London and proclaiming their intention of bringing the King to trial. They had removed Charles from the Isle of Wight, and had lodged him, for safety, in Hurst Castle on the Hampshire coast. Parliament, still largely Presbyterian and stubbornly reactionary in sentiment, had voted by a three-fifths majority for reconciliation. The result had been Pride's Purge. On 6 December Colonel Thomas Pride, with several regiments to enforce his orders, had debarred from the House all its more recalcitrant members, and forty-one persons had been arrested for resisting. The purged Commons had promptly applied itself to the business of a judicial trial. On 1 January they had passed the appropriate ordinance, and had appointed a High Court of Justice with about 150 members. When the Lords had balked at these revolutionary proceedings, the Commons, on 4 January, had resolved to act alone, thus making England virtually a republic. John Bradshaw had been chosen President of the Court of Justice, and on 20 January, in a hall crowded with excited spectators, the trial had begun. There had been violent protests and attempts to intercede, from Scotland, from the newly arrived Dutch ambassadors, from the now horrified Presbyterians. Forty-seven ministers, meeting at Sion College, had drawn up a document addressed to Fairfax, condemning the army's usurpation of power. Fifty-seven had signed a similar remonstrance. William Prynne, Clement Walker, and other Presbyterian writers had done their literary best. But the trial had proceeded with remarkable order, and on 27 January the King had been sentenced to death. In the inexorable march of events, as Milton viewed it, the firm hand of God had been evident, guiding

Bradshaw and the others upon whom the vast responsibility lay heaviest. History had been made, not without God's help.

It remained to vindicate the act with wise and calming words. It remained to inform the hesitant, to reassure the soft of heart. An antidote was wanted for the Presbyterian poison. Milton had anticipated these needs, and he was nearly ready with a pamphlet, about the length of *Areopagitica*, to be entitled *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates: proving, that it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any, who have the power, to call to account a tyrant, or wicked king, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death, if the ordinary magistrate have neglected, or denied to do it. And that they, who of late, so much blame deposing, are the men that did it themselves.* On or before 13 February 1649 the forty-two pages of this defence of regicide were printed and in the hands of the public.[1] Charles had been dead only two weeks when the pamphlet appeared; he had been buried at Windsor no more than four days before.

Eight years earlier, when Milton had first employed his pen in the cause of reformation, he had not foreseen that political upheaval would eventually follow. Nevertheless, in developing his own theory of civil liberty, with its idealistic assumption that human reason will be guided by human virtue, he had simply pursued the implications of his studied views on divorce. As he saw the problem, a contract between a king and his people should be no more binding than a marriage contract if the good for which the relationship was established had not in fact been achieved. The notion of absolute rule was a kind of treason against the dignity of mankind. The public good was the supreme law, and this could be determined through God's gift of right reason. A people 'free by nature' possessed, therefore, the right to depose and punish a tyrant. When the people as a whole neglected to exercise their right, an enlightened few must act on behalf of the many.

Such was the philosophy of regicide which Milton offered in *The Tenure of Kings*. He did not debate the guilt of Charles I; indeed, he carefully avoided any reference to the late King by name. The trial had been the business of others. His own concern was to justify the judging. And while he did not altogether eliminate references to a particular ruler recently under trial, or to the immediate crisis, he made perhaps the greatest effort of his career to achieve a tone of scholarly detachment. Wherever he failed, his secondary purpose in writing was usually responsible. He was thoroughly disgusted with the Presbyterians, and he meant to expose their pernicious hypocrisy.[2]

Who *were* these preachers so pitiful in denouncing regicide, so righteous in arousing the people against the people's own champions? They were the same 'ministers of sedition' (39) who, for seven long years, had incited the people against their King. Who were the 'dancing divines' (5) so busily wresting Scripture to justify themselves and condemn their countrymen?

They were the very men who had made war upon Charles, who had stripped him of both revenue and authority, who had put him in prison and conferred his power on others. They had broken oaths; they had renounced allegiance. Had they not been prevented by accident or flight, they had long since killed the King in battle. While the hope to be made lords of provinces and classes led them on, 'while pluralities greased them thick and deep' (6), they had been foremost in the fight against tyranny. And now what? They denounced deposing. The Presbyterians, who in point of fact had deposed the King, denounced deposing. Was it mere coincidence that they had since been checked in power, that man's conscience had been freed, that simony, plurality, and ecclesiastical covetousness had been condemned? Let no one be deceived; these 'were the men who in the truest sense killed the King' (37). The statutes and Scriptures they now quoted against their former associates would, if valid, 'fall first and heaviest upon their own heads' (5). They were a frustrated and self-repugnant faction, and their hypocritical counsel hazarded the welfare of a whole nation.

'None can love freedom heartily', wrote Milton, 'but good men; the rest love not freedom, but licence, which never hath more scope or more indulgence than under tyrants.' The rest, being naturally servile, 'have been always readiest with the falsified names of Loyalty and Obedience to colour over their base compliances' (1). For a time such men, because of a grievance or hope of gain, may support a good cause, may behave like true patriots. Yet when others

> go on to remove, not only the calamities and thraldoms of a people, but the roots and causes whence they spring, straight these men, and sure helpers at need, as if they hated only the miseries but not the mischiefs, after they have juggled and paltered with the world, bandied and borne arms against their King, divested him, disanointed him, nay, cursed him all over in their pulpits and their pamphlets to the engaging of sincere and real men, beyond what is possible or honest to retreat from, not only turn revolters from those principles which only could at first move them, but lay the stain of disloyalty and worse on those proceedings which are the necessary consequences of their own former actions—nor disliked by themselves, were they managed to the entire advantages of their own faction . . . [2]

The Presbyterians had not been guilty of rebellion when they sided with the Parliament, for the King had called for obedience to commands which were unlawful; but by their late actions they have made it seem rebellion, have made it appear guiltiness. Their 'riddling Covenant' (36), with its unnecessary words of allegiance to the actual enemy (included, no doubt, more from fear than fidelity), has confused the people. Covenants, however, 'are ever made according to the present state of persons and of things, and have ever the more general laws of nature and of reason in them, though not expressed' (35).

Preachers of all denominations should learn to keep their hands off civil affairs. If they were better pastors, if they did their proper work thoroughly, they would find no time to meddle. Above all, they should realize that teaching the Gospel 'differs from the censorious and supercilious lording over conscience' (44). Let all Christians learn toleration.

> As for the party called Presbyterian, of whom I believe very many to be good and faithful Christians, though misled by some of turbulent spirit, I wish them earnestly and calmly not to fall off from their first principles; nor to affect rigour and superiority over men not under them; nor to compel unforcible things, in religion especially, which if not voluntary, becomes a sin; nor to assist the clamour and malicious drifts of men whom they themselves have judged to be the worst of men, the obdurate enemies of God and His Church; nor to dart against the actions of their brethren, for want of other argument, those wrested laws and scriptures thrown by prelates and malignants against their own sides . . . Let them not oppose their best friends and associates, who molest them not at all, infringe not the least of their liberties—unless they call it their liberty to bind other men's consciences—but are still seeking to live at peace with them, and brotherly accord. [41-42]

If the Presbyterians cannot learn this simple lesson, they must take the consequences. As God rooted out the prelates, so will He root out their imitators, uncovering their greed and hypocrisy to the open world.

The Presbyterians were not, however, the only persons who were undermining confidence in the new government; and Milton was concerned to counteract the influence of still others, who had surrendered to 'a double tyranny, of custom from without, and blind affections within' (1). 'If God and a good cause give them victory, the prosecution whereof for the most part inevitably draws after it the alteration of laws, change of government, downfall of princes with their families, then comes the task to those worthies which are the soul of that enterprise to be sweat and laboured out amidst the throng and noises of vulgar and irrational men.' In a time of greatness Englishmen needed courage—courage based on understanding. Much harm could be done by mercy misguided, by timorous men who 'coming in the course of these affairs to have their share in great actions, above the form of law or custom (at least to give their voice and approbation), begin to swerve and almost shiver at the majesty and grandeur of some noble deed, as if they were newly entered into a great sin—disputing precedents, forms, and circumstances, when the Commonwealth nigh perishes for want of deeds in substance, done with just and faithful expedition. To these I wish better instruction, and virtue equal to their calling—the former of which . . . I shall endeavour, as my duty is, to bestow on them' (3-4). Such was the primary purpose of Milton's *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates.*

His 'instruction' concerned the nature of authority. At the centre of his argument was a sublime affirmation: that no mortal man, and no monarch, but Justice only, is the 'true sovereign and supreme majesty upon earth' (41). If to justice be added military victory, such as God had given the army and the present Parliament, then a people beheld 'the only warrants through all ages, next under immediate revelation, to exercise supreme power' (4–5).

'The root and source of all liberty' is the power of a people 'to dispose and economize in the land which God hath given them, as masters of family in their own house and free inheritance.' A free nation, therefore, such as the English boast themselves to be, possesses the natural and essential right 'to abolish any governor, supreme or subordinate, with the government itself upon urgent causes' (40). This being so, how much more justice to depose a tyrant! And how mild and humane to give that tyrant a fair and open trial! 'If the Parliament and military council do what they do without precedent, if it appear their duty, it argues the more wisdom, virtue, and magnanimity that they know themselves able to be a precedent to others, who perhaps in future ages, if they prove not too degenerate, will look up with honour and aspire toward these exemplary and matchless deeds of their ancestors as to the highest top of their civil glory and emulation' (41). Let living Englishmen, moreover, hearken 'with erected minds to the voice of our supreme magistracy, calling us to liberty and the flourishing deeds of a reformed Commonwealth' (39).

Milton accepted regicide as a civil product of general reformation. Hence, he believed firmly that God had placed the sword of justice in proper hands. 'For if all human power to execute, not accidentally but intendedly, the wrath of God upon evil doers without exception be of God, then that power, whether ordinary or (if that fail) extraordinary, so executing that intent of God, is lawful and not to be resisted' (7). This he dared to own as part of his faith, although he left to 'the uprighter sort' of magistrates the determination of 'who in particular is a tyrant' (6–7).

His views on the origins of civil government also stemmed from religious conviction:

> No man who knows aught can be so stupid to deny that *all men naturally were born free*, being the image and resemblance of God Himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures born to command and not to obey; and that they lived so till, from the root of Adam's transgression, falling among themselves to do wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and jointly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came cities, towns, and commonwealths. And because no faith in all was found sufficiently binding, they saw it needful to ordain some authority that might restrain by force and punishment what was violated against peace and common right. This authority and power of self-defence and preservation being originally *and naturally* in every one of them, and unitedly in them all, for ease, for order, and lest each man should be his own

> partial judge, they communicated and derived either to one, whom for the eminence of his wisdom and integrity they chose above the rest, or to more than one whom they thought of equal deserving. The first was called a king; the other, magistrates. [p. 8; italics added]

Continuing this simplified history of mankind, Milton discussed the origins of laws, of coronation oaths, of counsellors and parliaments, all explained as necessary checks on power delegated by the people. Titles assumed by some rulers, such as Sovereign Lord or Natural Lord, were mere arrogancies or flatteries. Hereditary titles were founded on either courtesy or convenience. To say that 'the king hath as good right to his crown and dignity as any man to his inheritance, is to make the subject no better than the king's slave' (11). To grant a whole people inferior to a single king is treason against the dignity of mankind. Kings are the deputies of the people; their power is entrusted power; 'and to him that shall consider well why, among free persons, one man by civil right should bear authority and jurisdiction over another, no other end or reason can be imaginable' (9).

Since, therefore, the power of kings and magistrates is 'derivative, transferred and committed to them in trust from the people to the common good', it follows that the people, in whom the power 'remains fundamentally' (10), may either retain or depose their governors, though no tyrants, 'merely by the liberty and right of free-born men to be governed as seems to them best' (14). As for the tyrant—'he who regarding neither law nor the common good, reigns only for himself and his faction' (18)—'the very principles of nature' direct what people may do against such a person, 'as against a common pest and destroyer of mankind' (19). To Milton, such conclusions are 'plain reason', but knowing that 'it is the vulgar folly of men to desert their own reason' (19), he brings to his argument the support of Scripture, history, and authorities 'fetched out of the midst of choicest and most authentic learning' (7). With undisguised pleasure he introduces a few Presbyterians who help him to prove his point.

*The Tenure of Kings* includes a few passages which reveal Milton's interest in international affairs. For example, he admonishes the Dutch, who once renounced King Philip of Spain, and who have since prospered, not to 'look with an evil and prejudicial eye upon their neighbours walking by the same rule' (31). There is a similar allusion to the Scots and Queen Mary. For breadth of vision, however, and faint intimations of future world-mindedness, nothing else from the pen of Milton can compare with these eloquent sentences:

> Who knows not that there is a mutual bond of amity and brotherhood between man and man over all the world? Neither is it the English Sea that can sever us from that duty and relation . . . Nor is it distance of place that makes enmity, but enmity that makes distance. He therefore that keeps peace with me, near or

remote, of whatsoever nation, is to me as far as all civil and human offices an Englishman and a neighbour. [21]

'This', says Milton, 'is Gospel, and this was ever law among equals.'[3]

Having thus expressed his opinions for the public welfare, he returned with relief to his life of seclusion, confident that he would now have 'plenty of leisure' for his scholarly pursuits. Working steadily through the latter part of February and the first part of March, he managed to complete the fourth chapter of his *History of Britain* and perhaps to start on the fifth. He looked forward to bringing the story all the way up to the tumultuous present. But this was never to be.[4]

On 13 March 1649, exactly one month after *The Tenure of Kings* was published, the newly organized, republican Council of State voted to offer John Milton the post of Secretary for the Foreign Tongues.[5] Here was a sudden, ironic reversal. The hobgoblin of the Presbyterians, the notorious 'divorcer', the man who had thought himself living in 'a world of disesteem' and who had retired from controversy for four whole years, was now in demand as a public official. Not only Milton's gifts for polemics in his native tongue, but also his reliable scholarship and linguistic skill were recognized by the fledgling Republic.

As Secretary for Foreign Languages his work for the Council of State would involve a variety of activities. When other nations recognized the new régime in England, it would be his task to expedite the important business of diplomacy by serving as an interpreter at audiences and conferences, by translating into English such letters and documents as were received from abroad or from foreign agents in London, and by translating into Latin, the international language, all letters prepared by the Council for transmission to foreign states. He would not be a voting member of the Council, and he would not compose the letters himself, unless they were such routine matters as might be left to the discretion of a secretary. He would be chiefly a translator, working from drafts carefully composed by the Council's Committee for Foreign Affairs, or from notes made during meetings with this committee or with the full Council. If the labour became too arduous, he would be given adequate assistance. Meanwhile, since other nations were eyeing the republican government with either suspicion or open hostility, the Council would use his talents in additional ways. He would be asked to conduct various investigations; he would occasionally be required to supervise the publishing of official papers. More immediately he would be ordered to reply, for the Republic, to a dangerous book which, purporting to be the memoirs of the late King, was arousing popular resentment against the new Government. The Republic needed an eloquent, effective spokesman. There would undoubtedly be still other books and pamphlets calling for rebuttal. Milton was peculiarly qualified for literary defence of the

Commonwealth, and, when international correspondence became a reality, his linguistic ability would make him extremely useful to the Council in its deliberations.[6]

Such were the secretarial duties as they may have been outlined to Milton by those Council members who called at his house to urge his acceptance. He seems not to have hesitated; his appointment was confirmed at the next meeting of the Council, on 15 March.[7] On the other hand, he had publicly declared, five years before, that he disliked translation.[8] What prompted him to accept a position in which he would constantly be writing, as Edward Phillips later put it, not 'his own sense, but what was dictated to him by his superiors'?[9] The answer is probably threefold. If we may judge from what actually happened during the first few years of Milton's secretaryship, he was assured of duties far more exciting and significant than translating. A second reason we shall explore in a moment. But even the translating must have seemed, in 1649, a truly providential opportunity for *service*. When he accepted the offer of the Council, he immediately poured his energies into the new work, utterly spendthrift of his time and strength and precious eyesight. Having been so long denied an appropriate demonstration of his usefulness, he laboured like a man possessed. Posterity has been contemptuous of his literary production in the early years of his secretaryship, but posterity can look back with clear eyes, whereas Milton was painfully focusing his weak ones on the bright altar of patriotism. His spirit was one of deliberate sacrifice. An hour had struck in the history of England, and he had not only been ready, but wanted. There was no reason to count the cost, when the calling had been so opportune. He was Samson, and his moment had come.[10]

As for the Council of State, they had added one more person to their secretarial staff, and their reflections on the appointment have not been recorded. Certainly their decision was based more on an inquiry into Milton's scholarship than on appreciation for his defence, in English, of the execution of tyrants. It has been suspected that persons high in authority asked him to write *The Tenure of Kings*, but there is no evidence to support this conjecture except the prompt sequel.[11] That the Council was aware of *The Tenure* and its author's gift for polemics in his native tongue is argued by the first uses to which it put its new secretary; but that some members of the Council were also well aware of Milton's learning and linguistic skill is obvious from the essential nature of the post to which he was called. The anonymous biographer assures us that, 'upon the change of government which succeeded the King's death, he was, without any seeking of his, by the means of a private acquaintance who was a member of the new Council of State, chosen Latin Secretary.'[12] This private acquaintance was probably Luke Robinson, who had been a fellow student with Milton at Christ's College; but whether Robinson or John Bradshaw or someone else, the Council did the choosing. Present on the afternoon of 13 March, when it was resolved to offer the position to Milton, were the following twenty-one members: Bradshaw (first President of the Council, and Milton's attorney in 1647), Robinson (an old acquaintance), Fairfax (to whom he had addressed a sonnet in 1648), Bulstrode Whitelocke (of the Whitelocke family resident at Horton), Oliver Cromwell, Sir Henry Vane, Basil Feilding (the second Earl of Denbigh), William Cecil (the second Earl of Salisbury), Lord Lisle, Sir Gilbert Pickering, Sir John Danvers, Sir Henry Mildmay, Sir William Masham, William Heveningham, Cornelius Holland, John Jones, Henry Marten, John Lisle, Thomas Scott, Rowland Wilson, and Isaac Penington. These men (and twenty others, absent on 13 March) were Milton's employers. The appointment was for a single year.[13]

It would be strange indeed if, when considering the proposal of the Council, Milton did not see public office as presenting certain possibilities for effecting reforms which he had fought for in vain as a private individual. If he did his work well, he would undoubtedly have influence on, as well as easy access to, the new leaders of government. Perhaps the dreams of *Areopagitica*, for example, could at last come true. In any case, the issues of *Areopagitica* were soon up for debate; as early as 12 May the Lord President of the Council (Bradshaw) was asked by his colleagues to 'prepare and bring in an Act concerning the prohibiting of the printing of invective and scandalous pamphlets against the Commonwealth'. The censorship ordinance of 1643, which Milton had once attacked, was still unrepealed, and even more severe measures were now being called for as England's uneasy new rulers were assailed in print on every side. On the other hand, perhaps here was the great opportunity to strike a blow for liberty! We do not know what Milton said privately to Bradshaw, or how much he attempted to influence others, but it is a reasonable guess that he was neither indifferent nor inactive. And Bradshaw's Press Act, as finally passed by Parliament on 20 September 1649, is a truly extraordinary document. Penned by a clever lawyer, it half conceals the art of a wise statesman. On a superficial reading it seems even more severe than the previous law, and, indeed, it does require strict censorship *of all news-letters*. But Milton, not missing the point of the progress actually achieved, was able to summarize it thus to his sympathetic friend, Samuel Hartlib: 'There are no licensers appointed by the last Act, so that everybody may enter in his book without licence, provided the printer's or author's name be entered, that they may be forthcoming if required.'[14] This was precisely one of the major points that *Areopagitica* had argued for. Call it coincidence if you will, but it seems more likely that the Secretary for Foreign Languages had been using his mother tongue effectively.

During his first year in public office (he was reappointed on 18 February 1650),[15] Milton was used by the Council in a great variety of capacities.

Because foreign powers were reluctant to accord diplomatic recognition to the upstart Republic, there was very little translating to do, although it is likely that his first assignment was to provide a Latin translation of the Parliament's official *Declaration* establishing the new government and justifying its recent actions. This was published on 22 March.[16] The record shows that the Secretary for Foreign Languages prepared only about seven letters of state during that whole year,[17] and was ordered to translate into English some French letters which had been submitted to Parliament by the Dutch ambassador (18 May),[18] and also a letter received from the Governor of Tetuán in Morocco (25 January 1650).[19] But Milton was kept busy in other ways. Papers of persons suspected of malignancy were often seized or intercepted, and these had to be scrutinized by some responsible official. Milton and the Serjeant-at-arms of the Council, Edward Dendy, were thus ordered to examine the books and papers of the Presbyterian Clement Walker (24 October),[20] and a William Small (11 June).[21] Either Milton or the Council's General Secretary, Gualter Frost, looked through a batch of letters suspected of concern with the exportation of prohibited goods (20 April).[22] Milton alone seems to have been entrusted with investigation of the papers seized from Lady Mary Killigrew (12 May),[23] John Lee (30 May),[24] and the notorious pamphleteer (later his good friend) Marchamont Needham (23 June).[25] The Public Record Office at Whitehall was, not surprisingly, in a bad state of disorder following the change in government, and Milton was asked (16 July) to 'have an inspection' into it.[26] Public records held in private hands were to be turned over to him for proper disposition (2 February 1650).[27] He was also ordered to arrange for the speedy publication of a book on Ireland, written by a Thomas Waring (8 January 1650).[28] On 16 December a book in French, licensed 'under the hand of Master Milton, secretary to the Council of State', was registered for publication at Stationers' Hall.[29] And, at various times during the year, the Council requested no fewer than four books or pamphlets from his own pen. As it happened, he found time for only three of the four.

One request came eleven days after his appointment as secretary. John Lilburne, the irrepressible, pen-happy Leveller, had just published a slashing attack on the new government entitled *England's New Chains Discovered*. This pamphlet, which appeared in two parts, not only denounced the power and membership of the Council of State, but also demanded its complete elimination as a governing body. Since the Levellers were the ultra-democratic group within the Republic itself, and since the army was already infected by their radical doctrines, such criticism was regarded as extremely dangerous, if not treasonable. On 26 March the Council ordered Milton to compose an official answer to the offending tract.[30]

Two days later, following a debate in Parliament on the Irish situation, the Council ordered Milton to compose some *Observations* expressive of the Parliament's views. On the same day, 28 March, Lilburne and three of his fellow Levellers—Richard Overton, Thomas Prince, and William Walwyn—were arrested, examined by the Council, and committed to the Tower. The Irish matter became the more urgent of the two requests made of the new Secretary, and he immediately began preparing the *Observations* required. Eventually an official reply to the Levelling tract was published (2 June), but this pamphlet, called *The Discoverer*, was from another hand than Milton's. By the time he had finished the *Observations* on Ireland, an even more urgent literary task awaited his pen.[31]

The Irish situation, for hardly the first or the last time in British history, was then a 'complication of interests'. So the Council rather mildly described it in their order to Milton. James Butler, the Earl of Ormond, desperately trying to strengthen the Royalist cause, had promised political independence for Ireland and religious freedom for Irish Catholics in Articles of Peace signed on behalf of King Charles, 17 January 1649. Thirteen days later the King was dead, but the revolutionary concession stood, and Irish Catholics rallied to Ormond's Irish Anglicans in support of Charles II. On 15 February the Scottish Presbyterians of Ulster, horrified by the shape of events in England, published a *Representation of the Present Evils*. Royalists were jubilant over this sympathetic conjunction of normally irreconcilable elements, and Ormond wrote, on 9 March, to Colonel Michael Jones, the Parliament's governor of Dublin, urging him to desert his trust and declare for Charles II. The only satisfaction for republicans in this disconcerting series of events was the firm refusal by Jones to betray the Parliament.[32]

Milton's *Observations*, together with the various documents pertinent to the business, were in print by 16 May, exactly seven weeks after the Council had ordered their writing and publication.[33] He expressed, of course, an official attitude, and he did not sign his name to the treatise; but we may confidently trace the tone of personal conviction in much that he wrote. As in the anti-episcopal tracts of eight years before, he denounced 'a secular and carnal tyranny over spiritual things'; 'the Church began then most apparently to degenerate, and go to ruin, when she borrowed of the civil power more than fair encouragement and protection' (250). False religion and atheism, he declared, are best combated by true religion, not by the state, not by 'the weak hand of magistracy'. Speaking ostensibly for his superiors, he asserted further that 'they think not money or stipend to be the best encouragement of a true pastor' (249–50). He condemned 'the sloth, the spleen, the insufficiency of churchmen in the execution of spiritual discipline over those within their charge' (250), and affirmed that the best regulated governments 'have been so prudent as never to employ the civil sword further than the edge of it could reach, that is, to civil offences only—proving always against objects that were spiritual a ridiculous weapon. Our protection, therefore, to men in civil matters unoffensive we cannot deny; their consciences we leave, as not within our cognizance, to the proper cure of instruction, praying for them' (251). The state, he promised, will 'not tolerate the free exercise of any religion which shall be found absolutely contrary to sound doctrine or the power of godliness' (263); but it is the function of the clergy themselves to extirpate heresy and error 'in the diligent preaching and insisting upon sound doctrine, in the confuting (not the railing down) errors, encountering both in public and private conference, and by the power of truth (not of persecution) subduing those authors of heretical opinions, and lastly in the spiritual execution of church discipline within their own congregations' (262–3). These exercises of a true ministry the state will favour and protect; but it will not encroach; it will stick to its own concerns, as the clergy should also do.

To voice again these heartfelt convictions, and to see them published as a commitment of his country, must have afforded Milton immense satisfaction. He spoke now, not for himself, but for England. Arguments already advanced in his *Tenure of Kings*, but repeated here in defence of that 'impartial and noble piece of justice wherein the hand of God appeared so evidently on our side' (252), became official arguments. A sovereign, he said again, is not above law, is not unaccountable in 'authority over men naturally his equals' (247). Hence, all nations, in all ages, have punished unjust rulers. 'The difference only is, which rather seems to us matter of glory, that they for the most part have without form of law done the deed by a kind of martial justice; we, by the deliberate and well-weighed sentence of legal judicature.' Not only has the government published its justification; 'books also have been written to the same purpose for men to look on that will' (267).

The last, and longest, part of Milton's *Observations* was devoted to the 'unsufferable insolency' (270) of the Presbyterian upstarts 'from a barbarous nook of Ireland' (265). The 'slanderous and seditious libel sent abroad' (258) by these incendiaries and busybodies thoroughly aroused his ire. By what right did such ignorant clerics presume to teach beyond the presbytery of Belfast? By what right, moreover, did priests interfere in secular matters? Let them remember what they so often admonished the bishops: 'affairs of state are not for their meddling' (256). They charged others with covenant-breaking while they themselves were 'as deep in that guilt as those of their own nation [Scotland] the last year' (263). Once more on the subject of Presbyterian hypocrisy, Milton committed the new Republic to some caustic comment. 'Since their heaving out the prelates to heave in themselves' (257), the Presbyterians have not only tried to enrich and exalt their own sect, but have turned against their benefactors. They have acted in politics 'as if they were a tribe and party by themselves', and, like the bishops before them, have sought 'an absolute and undepending jurisdiction' (258). Although the Republic has in no way opposed Presbyterian government, 'nevertheless, as we perceive it aspiring to be a compulsive power upon all without exception . . . or to require the fleshly arm of magistracy in the execution of a spiritual discipline, to punish and amerce by any corporal infliction those whose consciences cannot be edified by what authority they are compelled, we hold it no more to be "the hedge and bulwark of religion" than the popish and prelatical courts, or the Spanish Inquisition' (264). As for regicide, the protests of the blockish Presbyters of Belfast betray total ignorance of history—even ignorance of the fact 'that John Knox, who was the first founder of Presbytery in Scotland, taught professedly the doctrine of deposing and of killing kings' (266). 'We have long observed', Milton said for England, 'to what pass the bold ignorance and sloth of our clergy tends, no less now than in the bishops' days, to make their bare sayings and censures authentic with the people, though destitute of any proof or argument' (264). 'But wherefore spend we two such precious things as time and reason upon priests, the most prodigal misspenders of time, and the scarcest owners of reason?' (267).

Milton's *Observations* extended, of course, to the Articles of Peace with the Irish rebels, and Ormond's letter to loyal Colonel Jones. He marvelled at the 'strange besottedness' (249), even in such a 'windy railer' (255) as Ormond, which made an alliance with Irish Catholics and then called others 'subverters of true religion'. The retort was so obvious that a fool might have anticipated it: 'All men who are true Protestants, of which number he gives out to be one, know not a more immediate and killing subverter of all true religion than Antichrist, whom they generally believe to be the Pope and Church of Rome' (249). Far from countenancing Catholicism, as Ormond has, the Republic confined papists 'to the bare enjoyment of that which is not in our reach, their consciences' (249). As for Ormond's charge of anarchy in England, Milton dismissed it as 'the overworn objection of every trivial talker' (252). On the other hand, what anarchy had the seditious Earl produced, by alienating a whole kingdom, by advancing Irish Catholics 'to a condition of freedom superior to what any English Protestants durst have demanded' (244)? Such concessions to a barbaric people 'justly made our vassals', given without the consent of the English Parliament, constituted an adequate reason for dethroning King Charles 'though no other crime were laid against him' (246). No true-born Englishman could read the Articles of Peace without indignation. Ormond and his royal master had sold away the vengeance demanded by a whole nation for the blood of countrymen massacred.

Writing 'by authority', Milton had nothing kind to say for the Irish. They were a treacherous race, 'indocible and averse from all civility and amendment' (245). He ridiculed their 'absurd and savage customs', and asserted that 'by their endless treasons and revolts [they] have deserved to hold no Parliament at all, but to be governed by edicts and garrisons' (244). They were fitting allies, however, for the Scottish Presbyterians of Ulster, who by courtesy of England held possessions in 'a country better than their own' (271).

An incidental purpose of Milton's *Observations* was to defend the assumption of power in the Republic by a 'sectarian army' (267) so called, and by the 'dregs and scum of the House of Commons' (254). He briefly denied that a true Parliament must represent the 'three estates' (253), but devoted a full paragraph in justification of Pride's Purge. The imprisoned members invited their fate by 'conspiring and banding against the public good'.

> No question but it is as good and necessary to expel rotten members out of the House as to banish delinquents out of the land; and the reason holds as well in forty as in five. And if they be yet more, the more dangerous is their number. They had no privilege to sit there and vote home the author, the impenitent author, of all our miseries, to freedom, honour, and royalty, for a few fraudulent if not destructive concessions. Which that they went about to do, how much more clear it was to all men, so much the more expedient and important to the Commonwealth was their speedy seizure and exclusion, and no breach of any just privilege, but a breach of their knotted faction. [265-6]

As for Oliver Cromwell, whom Ormond had mentioned with much contempt, Cromwell 'hath done in few years more eminent and remarkable deeds whereon to found nobility in his house . . . than Ormond and all his ancestors put together can show from any record of their Irish exploits, the widest scene of their glory.' The Earl surely forgot himself when he sneered at one 'whose valour and high merit many enemies more noble than himself have both honoured and feared' (252).

Before Milton had finished writing the *Observations*, news that the Scots of Ulster were in armed revolt against the Republic strengthened his emphasis on 'the sympathy, good intelligence, and joint pace which they go in the north of Ireland with their copartning rebels in the south' (255). To all traitors he promised, in fit season, 'the due correction of their superiors' (259). He did not say so, but the Council of State had nominated Oliver Cromwell to be commander-in-chief of the armies for Ireland on 15 March, the same busy day on which they had appointed Milton their Secretary for Foreign Languages.

Cromwell left London for Ireland on 10 July. Meanwhile, the Council's new secretary, little occupied with foreign languages, was absorbed in another literary defence of his country. In order to be within easy call of his employers, he had taken temporary lodgings with one Thomson, whose house was next door to the Bull Head tavern at Charing Cross, opening into the Spring Garden. This was much nearer Whitehall than the High Holborn residence, and a brief walk brought him to any meetings at which his presence became necessary. Eventually, as a servant of the Council, he hoped to have lodgings in Whitehall itself.[34]

During 1649 the English Republic, unrecognized abroad, feared or suspected at home, anxiously tried to create a favourable public opinion. Its efforts were embarrassed, however, by the demoralizing influence of two extraordinary books. It had conquered by the sword, but the pen of propaganda was seriously threatening its victory. Among the educated classes of England and, worse, the entire continent of Europe, a very formidable volume was causing trouble. The celebrated classical scholar, Claudius Salmasius,[35] had been commissioned by Charles II to write a learned *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I*, aimed at an international audience and shrewdly calculated to discredit the regicides in the council chambers of foreign powers. Published in early November, this Latin bombshell had at least three editions in 1649, and translations into French and Dutch were planned.[36] No English translation was needed, for in the homeland of the regicides an entirely different sort of book was producing disaffection in all classes.

This was the *Eikon Basilike*, popularly known as the King's Book. Immediately following the execution of Charles I, when a sudden wind of revulsion had swept over the dried-up emotions of the people, the King's Book had been the unlooked-for and dreadful flame. Within weeks it was everywhere, circulating mysteriously in countless copies, arousing abhorrence at the brutal murder of Charles the Martyr. Parliament tried in vain to suppress it. The Council was sorely vexed. Someone, they decided, must answer this volume, must start a counter-blaze, before the fire was beyond all control. Cromwell, it is said, tried hard to persuade John Selden to make the attempt, and Selden, understandably, refused. Milton was given the assignment, perhaps as late as May, but more probably at the time of his appointment as Secretary. It is not difficult to imagine his reaction if a member of the committee visiting him on 13 March outlined the situation and asked: 'Do you think you could do it?'[37]

What was the *Eikon Basilike* or 'King's Image'? Its sub-title suggests its tenor: *The True Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings.* It was a masterpiece of calculated sentimentality, a pathetic and pietistic collection of prayers and meditations allegedly composed by the late monarch. Borrowing its poignancy from well-remembered situations, ringing the changes of customary loyalty, it sketched the record of recent history as endured by a benevolent but misunderstood father of his people. The narrative part of the book was in black and white, with no shading; Charles was a well-meaning but unhappily thwarted ruler, his enemies were heartless villains. The whole purported to be an artless piece of spiritual autobiography, never intended for publication. It was, in fact, a clever literary canonization of Charles, secretly concocted in large part by Dr. John Gauden, an episcopal divine, who eventually confessed his authorship. But meanwhile, the King's Book inspired a marvellous, cult-like worship of its supposed author's memory which persisted, not for years, but for centuries. It was read with tears and with resentment; it was placed reverently beside the Bible in Royalist parlours. More than Prince Rupert's pirates on the high seas, or the threat of a thousand Scottish swords, it menaced the English experiment in self-government. Something like sixty editions were exhausted within a year, so great was the volume's popularity.[38]

In composing an official answer to the *Eikon Basilike*, and publishing it (by permission) under his own initials, Milton was participating in the kind of controversy of which he had earlier dreamed. Back in 1641 he had fought, for the most part anonymously, on the edges of the Smectymnuan affair; later, as a solitary advocate, he had failed to promote a real discussion of the problem of divorce. Now, most amazingly, he was part of a battle royal, with a government behind him, and with great issues at stake. But he was not happy about it. His former experiences had left a scar. He still desired fame, but doubted that this book would bring it; indeed, he was not 'destitute of other hopes and means, better and more certain to attain it' (63). His reply to the *Eikon* was 'a work assigned, rather than by me chosen or affected' (64). He made it quite clear to his readers that he disliked his subject—chiefly because he anticipated the response. 'Considering the envy and almost infinite prejudice likely to be stirred up among the common sort against whatever can be written or gainsaid to the King's Book', he approached his task with sadness and apprehension, hoping half pathetically for his 'own readers, few perhaps, but those few . . . of value and substantial worth' (65).[39]

We can look back now, and see clearly, what Milton intuitively felt, that the task was impossible, that a sentimental and vulgar appeal can be countered only with more potent sentimentality, not with logic, not with careful argument, not even with great eloquence. We can see that Milton's assignment was beyond his powers—that neither an *Eikon Basilike* nor an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be robbed of maudlin effectiveness through chapter-by-chapter refutation. The King's Book had captured an audience which the Secretary for Foreign Languages was incapable of reaching. He waved no flags; he invited no tears. He tried to be reasonable, and succeeded in being largely irrelevant.

He began late, and took his time about the writing. Although in early June there was a sarcastic announcement that the author of the divorce tracts was answering the 'idolized meditations of the late King',[40] it was not until 6 October, or perhaps even a month later, that the book was published.[41] He called it *Eikonoklastes*, 'the famous surname of many Greek emperors who in their zeal to the command of God, after long tradition of idolatry in the Church, took courage and broke all superstitious images to pieces' (68). He hoped, however faintly, to smash the fiction of the *Eikon Basilike* by reminding people of the facts they had forgotten. His method was simply to examine the King's Book section by section, and to expose each rationalization or falsehood with the once-familiar record of recent events. Since the *Eikon* was conveniently vague and very repetitious, Milton chafed openly at the results of his method on his own writing. He was prolix, and knew it. His reply filled 242 quarto pages, considerably more words than he had found necessary in the two longest of his previous pamphlets combined.

When Milton composed *Eikonoklastes* he had lost all faith in the common people, and he did not try to conceal his disillusion. 'Except some few, who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of freedom, and have testified it by their matchless deeds', the people as a whole, he now realized, 'with a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit . . . are ready to fall flat and give adoration to the image and memory of this man' (69). He did not underestimate the influence of the *Eikon Basilike*. 'This is read, I doubt not, and believed; and as there is some use of everything, so is there of this book, were it but to show us what a miserable, credulous, deluded thing that creature is which is called the vulgar, who notwithstanding what they might know, will believe such vainglories as these' (143). In his reply he quite frankly despaired of informing the general public, 'exorbitant and excessive in all their motions' (68), 'an inconstant, irrational, and image-doting rabble' (309). He called them 'the mad multitude' (70, 101), 'the silly people' (214). He hoped only to correct and recover some 'whom perhaps ignorance without malice, or some error less than fatal, hath for the time misled, on this side sorcery or obduration' (309). He was far from optimistic.

His disillusion was aggravated by his personal contempt for the book which had done so much damage. To him, the *Eikon* was palpable and outrageous in its hypocrisy. Beyond all cure were persons who could not be convinced by the demonstrable contrast between the King's words and his 'far differing deeds' (72). Yet Milton expected few cures. People already persuaded that the King's excuses were 'most virtuous, most manly, most Christian, and most martyr-like' (305), people who considered the *Eikon* 'a monument of his worth and wisdom' (103), were blinded by their foolish emotions, and impervious to reason. They accepted their idol's 'often iterated commendation of himself' (214); they were willing victims of 'the plausibility of large and indefinite words' (174). The book was exasperatingly successful in 'building many fair and pious conclusions upon false and wicked premisses, which deceive the common reader not well discerning the antipathy of such connexions' (94). Even the picture set in front (by the engraver William Marshall) 'would martyr him and saint him to befool the people' (68); it was 'set there to catch fools and silly gazers' (67), and it had succeeded. Milton sneered at the vulgarity of this portrait, with its 'quaint emblems and devices begged from the old pageantry of some Twelfth Night's entertainment at Whitehall' (68); but he also recognized its effectiveness.

Despite the odds, the *Eikonoklastes* was, of course, necessary. Someone had to write it; someone had to take up the gauntlet, for the *Eikon* seemed 'to be the challenge both of him and all his party'. An answer was important 'for their sakes who through custom, simplicity, or want of better teaching have not more seriously considered kings than in the gaudy name of Majesty, and admire them and their doings as if they breathed not the same breath with other mortal men' (63). With this thought in mind, Milton is more radically republican in tone than he had been in his *Tenure of Kings*. 'As kings go now,' he writes, 'what shadowy conceit or groundless toy will not create a jealousy?' (101). 'The breeding of most kings hath been ever sensual and most humoured' (177). 'The earth itself hath too long groaned under the burden of their injustice, disorder, and irreligion' (306). Yet kings 'are but weak at arguments, as they who ever have accustomed from the cradle to use their will only as their right hand, their reason always as their left' (63). King Charles is offered as a case in point, and Milton discusses him with studied disrespect. Since it is unreasonable that the dead should have more freedom to speak than the living, Milton will use 'no more courtship than he uses'. Having triumphed over the force of his arms, the Republic will 'meet the force of his reason' (66), such as it is. The *Eikon* has made a 'new appeal to Truth' (65); it 'pretends reason, not authorities and quotations' (121). Very well then, what are the facts? The late monarch was 'a man neither by nature nor by nurture wise' (135). He 'offered at more cunning fetches to undermine our liberties, and put tyranny into an art, than any British king before him' (69). His book, pretending the opposite, is a huddle of lies and hypocrisy.

Milton realized, as did other men at the time, that the *Eikon Basilike* was probably a forgery. Suspecting 'the hand of some household priest' (147) or 'rhetorician' (104), especially in passages 'above his known style' (112), he nevertheless concluded: 'But as to the author of these soliloquies, whether it were the late King, as is vulgarly believed, or any secret coadjutor, and some stick not to name him, it can add nothing, nor shall take from the weight, if any be, of reason which he brings' (72). No matter who wrote the book, it had to be answered, and Charles, whether author or not, was the obvious target for attack. Truth would suffer if Milton yielded to a pedantic concern for the fact of attribution.[42]

Nevertheless, plagiarism and literary forgery were on his mind when he wrote *Eikonoklastes*. Commenting on the King's use of David's Psalms, he remarked, 'Such kind of borrowing as this, if it be not bettered by the borrower, among good authors is accounted plagiary' (259). Elsewhere he declared, 'It is not hard for any man who hath a Bible in his hands to borrow good words and holy sayings in abundance, but to make them his own is a work of grace only from above' (264). To Milton it was obvious that the watery argument of the *Eikon Basilike* was topped by an iridescent film of holy oil; but the mad multitude, untutored in the chemistry of conviction, saw instead a saturation of sanctity. Milton warned that 'the deepest policy of a tyrant hath been ever to counterfeit religious', and among other examples he quoted from *Richard III* by Shakespeare—'one whom we well know was the closest companion of these his solitudes' (84). It was one thing, however, to accuse the King of pretended piety, and another to exhibit proof. Milton found the proof through a piece of literary detection. In some (not all) copies of the *Eikon Basilike* there was a 'prayer in time of captivity', alleged to have been delivered by the King, just before his death, to the faithful Dr. Juxon. This moving specimen of private devotion was plagiarized, Milton discovered, from 'no serious book, but the vain, amatorious poem of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, a book in that kind full of worth and wit, but among religious thoughts and duties not worthy to be named, nor to be read at any time without good caution, much less in time of trouble and affliction to be a Christian's prayerbook' (86). The King's theft of a pagan prayer was a pretty index to his piety; and Milton hoped, by revealing the artifice, 'to throw contempt and disgrace in the sight of all men upon this his idolized book, and the whole rosary of his prayers' (87).[43]

The *Eikon Basilike* was so stubbornly Episcopal, and its comment on the Presbyterians was so reproachful, that there was reason to hope for Presbyterian hostility toward the volume. For this or whatever reason, the *Eikonoklastes* was kinder to Presbyterian feelings than the *Tenure* or the *Observations* had been. Perhaps Milton was influenced by the necessity of restating many of the arguments formerly used in defence of Smectymnuus. Again he found himself damning the prelates and their 'ignorant, profane, and vicious clergy, learned in nothing but the antiquity of their pride, their covetousness and superstition, whose insincere and leavenous doctrine corrupting the people, first taught them looseness, then bondage; loosening them from all sound knowledge and strictness of life, the more to fit them for the bondage of tyranny and superstition' (154). Again he found himself condemning the liturgy, and set prayers, and all ostentation of ceremony. Nevertheless, he could not completely spare the group which had aspired to Episcopal power. 'There is a large difference', he observed, 'between forcing men by the sword to turn Presbyterians, and defending those who willingly are so, from a furious inroad of bloody bishops' (205). He had not forgotten, and did not intend others to forget, that it was both 'the prelates and their fellow teachers (though of another name and sect) whose pulpit stuff, both first and last, hath been the doctrine and perpetual infusion of servility' (69).

To modern taste the *Eikonoklastes* is a meticulous, often tiresome piece of refutation. Its author, very conscious of writing as an official of the Government, is careful to explain fully and interpret properly the many incidents alluded to in the King's Book, from the calling of the Long Parliament and the Earl of Strafford's death, to the army's seizure of the King at Holmby House and the stormy events that followed. He is partisan, of course, but he is also painstaking in his use of reputable parliamentary authorities. He cites declarations and documents; he refers occasionally to recent books. For much of his material he relies upon Thomas May's official *History of Parliament*. He carefully builds a foundation of fact as a vantage ground for verbal bombardment.[44]

The bombardment, however, has its magnificent moments. There are explosions that cover the King with fine contempt: 'One great hog may do as much mischief in a garden as many little swine' (115). There are brief, unexpected flashes of light: 'A private conscience sorts not with a public calling' (91). 'He that will be unjust to man will be sacrilegious to God' (187). 'A good principle not rightly understood may prove as hurtful as a bad' (151). 'To bad kings, who without cause expect future glory from their actions, it happens as to bad poets, who sit and starve themselves with a delusive hope to win immortality by their bad lines' (219). There are also passages, not a few (if one has the patience to find them), which approach in both interest and effectiveness the best of Milton's prose. Here, for example, is a memorable pronouncement on national health:

> It were a nation miserable indeed, not worth the name of a nation, but a race of idiots, whose happiness and welfare depended upon one man. The happiness of a nation consists in true religion, piety, justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude, and the contempt of avarice and ambition. They in whomsoever these virtues dwell eminently, need not kings to make them happy, but are the architects of their own happiness, and whether to themselves or others are not less than kings [254]

These words were written, significantly, before the declining sun of republican ardour had lengthened the shadow of the Council member named Cromwell.

The *Eikonoklastes* inevitably concludes with another defence of regicide, and to argument, old and new, Milton adds his reflections on moral values involved:

> Truth is but Justice in our knowledge, and Justice is but Truth in our practice ... For Truth is properly no more than contemplation, and her utmost efficiency is but teaching; but Justice in her very essence is all strength and activity, and hath a sword put into her hand to use against all violence and oppression on the earth. She it is most truly who excepts no person, and exempts none from the severity of her stroke. She never suffers injury to prevail but when falsehood first prevails over Truth—and that also is a kind of justice done on them who are so deluded ... it were extreme partiality and injustice, the flat denial and overthrow of herself,

> to put her own authentic sword into the hand of an unjust and wicked man, or so far to except and exalt one mortal person above his equals that he alone shall have the punishing of all other men transgressing, and not receive like punishment from men when he himself shall be found the highest transgressor.

By reminding them of the supremacy of Justice, Milton hopes 'to set free the minds of Englishmen from longing to return poorly under that captivity of kings, from which the strength and supreme sword of Justice hath delivered them' (292–3).

Passages of eloquent generality, such as the last two quoted, are not so conspicuous in the *Eikonoklastes* as are passages of stinging contempt. The King's Book had been a processional of pious intentions, with the royal conscience swinging like a censer; and Milton the Protestant smelled 'the common grounds of tyranny and popery, sugared a little over' (64). It had been so easy for Charles, 'and so frequent, to call his obstinacy Reason, and other men's reason Faction' (79). Indeed, 'no man so obstinate or so much a tyrant but professes to be guided by that which he calls his reason and his judgement, though never so corrupted' (82). As for the 'incommunicable jewel of his conscience', which Charles had so piously pleaded:

> It seems that his conscience was none of the Crown Jewels, for those, we know, were in Holland not incommunicable to buy arms against his subjects. Being therefore but a private jewel, he could not have done a greater pleasure to the kingdom than by 'reserving it to himself'. But he, contrary to what is here professed, would have his conscience not an incommunicable but a universal conscience, the whole kingdom's conscience. Thus what he seems to fear lest we should ravish from him, is our chief complaint that he obtruded upon us. We never forced him to part with his conscience, but it was he that would have forced us to part with ours.... The more our evil hap, that three kingdoms should be thus pestered with one conscience . . . [176–7]

Even supposing the King to have been truly pious, there is nothing so 'faulty as a blind zeal' (151), and 'piety grounded upon error can no more justify King Charles than it did Queen Mary in the sight of God or man' (225). 'God bids us "Be subject for conscience' sake", that is, as to a magistrate and in the laws—not usurping over spiritual things, as Lucifer beyond his sphere' (218). If the King had not been such 'a perpetual preacher of his own virtues' (200), he might have realized that 'in some things to be overcome is more honest and laudable than to conquer' (151).

In defence of revolution Milton gave utterance to deeply personal conviction, to which his political philosophy had recently adjusted itself. Every established law, in his opinion, must be 'mutable upon just occasion', for 'all human laws are but the offspring of that frailty, that fallibility and imperfection which was in their authors' (281). 'That is not always best which is most regular to written law. Great worthies heretofore, by disobeying law, ofttimes have saved the commonwealth' (271). 'Laws are in the hands of Parliament to change or abrogate, as they shall see best for the Commonwealth, even to the taking away of kingship itself when it grows too masterful and burdensome' (175). When we read such sentiments as these, we may remember that a great symbolic law-breaker, in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, 'with head erect thus cried aloud':

> Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
> I have performed, as reason was, obeying.

And then the temple fell.

Retrospect casts a weird light on certain passages in *Eikonoklastes*. We have already quoted one above: did Milton still believe, at the Restoration of Charles II, that 'in some things to be overcome is more honest and laudable than to conquer'? Did he believe of himself what he said of Charles I: 'Whom God hardens, them also He blinds' (231)? 'And he who, without warrant but his own fantastic surmise, takes upon him perpetually to unfold the secret and unsearchable mysteries of High Providence, is likely for the most part to mistake and slander them' (272)—what of this sentiment? Having pronounced thus, he gave a more qualified statement of the argument from success than had appeared in *The Tenure of Kings*: 'We measure not our cause by our success, but our success by our cause. Yet certainly in a good cause success is a good confirmation . . . If it argue not for us, we are sure it argues not against us, but as much or more for us than ill success argues for them' (307). As for the possibility of a restoration of the Stuarts and a generous Act of Oblivion: 'They who with a good conscience and upright heart did their civil duties in the sight of God and in their several places, to resist tyranny and the violence of superstition banded both against them, he may be sure will never seek to be forgiven that which may be justly attributed to their immortal praise, nor will assent ever to the guilty blotting out of those actions before men, by which their faith assures them they chiefly stand approved and are had in remembrance before the throne of God' (286). Brave words, and eleven years would bring the hard test of their sincerity! Milton had committed both his government and himself to an uncompromising, utterly inflexible course. He had almost, in his republican pride, put conviction beyond the reach of clemency.

On 19 November 1649, one month and a half after the publication of *Eikonoklastes*, the Council of State ordered that their Secretary for Foreign Languages should have lodgings in Whitehall. Specifically, they planned to provide him with an apartment in Scotland Yard, previously occupied by Sir John Hippesley, Member of Parliament for Cockermouth. We may be sure that, as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made, Milton moved from his temporary quarters in the Thomson house at Charing Cross, to become physically a member of the official family of the Republic.[45]

Not until the first few months of 1650 could he have felt much like a Secretary for Foreign Languages. His labours until then had been largely in English, and he had been, in fact, a special literary assistant to the Council. His country's relations with foreign powers were still unsettled. Parliament had declared (17 August) its intentions of upholding and renewing leagues and amities between England and other nations, but other nations had conspicuously failed to publish similar statements. On 31 January, however, Parliament appointed Anthony Ascham to be resident to Madrid, Charles Vane, agent to Portugal, and Richard Bradshaw, agent to Hamburg. These able men, if successful on their missions, would make plenty of work for Milton. He had already translated three letters for transmission to Hamburg, but the first, done within ten days after his appointment as Secretary, was never delivered, and the second, also requesting that English merchants be protected from persecution by Royalist exiles, had accomplished little or nothing. The Cavalier party was distressingly influential on the Continent. Dr. Isaac Dorislaus, who had been sent as an envoy to the United Provinces the previous April, had been assassinated. The same fate might be in store for these three new representatives of the Parliament—as they, and everyone else, fully realized.

We must not leave behind the year 1649, however, before noting a few events and a few publications of either probable or certain interest to Milton. There were, for example, two deaths of people about whom he had pleasant memories: Giovanni Diodati of Geneva, whom he had visited in 1639, and the Earl of Bridgewater, whom he had honoured in *Comus*. William Chappell, the tutor who had made miserable his first year at Cambridge, also died this year. (And 1649 saw the passing of Richard Crashaw, Endymion Porter, and William Drummond of Hawthornden.[46]) It was either in this year or the next that Edward Phillips was admitted for a brief sojourn at Magdalen Hall, Oxford—a choice of university in which one may suspect his uncle's disappointment in Cambridge to have been a factor.[47] Another former pupil, the young Earl of Barrymore, married Susan Killigrew—to the great distress of some members of his family.[48] We do not know where Cyriack Skinner was in 1649, but his mother, doubtless a friend of Milton, having recently made her will, moved from Lincolnshire to Lambeth Marsh in Surrey.[49] Another friend, Colonel Robert Overton, was suspected of disloyalty to the new government, as the Council of State informed General Fairfax on 28 May.[50] As the year closed, Dr. Nathan Paget—eventually, if not already, Milton's good friend—was recommended to be physician to the Tower, a post that Dr. Diodati had earlier sought in vain.[51] Of books, there were many new ones for Milton to notice in 1649. Thomas Paget published *A Religious Scrutiny concerning Unequal Marriage*; Robert Gell, formerly a Fellow of Christ's College, published *Stella Nova, a New Star*; Lady Eleanor

Douglas's *Samson's Fall* appeared; and there were two works by Henry Lawrence. Of particular interest to Milton in his official capacity were *The Princely Pellican*, published on or before 2 July as a defence of the royal authorship of *Eikon Basilike*, and *Eikon Alethine*, published on or before 26 August as a denial of King Charles's authorship. A copy of the latter work allegedly bearing Milton's autograph on the title page has survived.[52] Milton may or may not have had the leisure or interest in 1649 to read such a book as Richard Lovelace's *Lucasta*, but it would be most interesting to know how he felt about the suppression, on 19 March (soon after he entered the service of the Republic), of *The Alcoran of Mahomet*.

A precocious young man who had hoped, and failed, to make Milton's acquaintance in 1646–7 became a fellow writer for the Council of State on 14 May 1649. This was John Hall of Durham. Milton's *Observations* on the Irish problem were about to be published, and he had next to turn his attention to the writing of *Eikonoklastes*; so Hall was employed to reply to various other criticisms of the government, including one by William Prynne. His answer to Prynne was found satisfactory and on 17 October was ordered to be printed. But evidently he and Milton did not meet, and two months later (if my dating of the letter is correct) he once again asked Samuel Hartlib about the possibility of engaging his learned colleague in correspondence. He had just had 'a loving and modest express from worthy Mr. Milton'—perhaps praising the reply to Prynne—but he was uncertain about how to respond.[53] Milton, of course, was very busy. Early in February 1650 he had to prepare letters of credence for both Ascham and Vane, and at the end of March he prepared a similar introduction for Bradshaw. Having written in English against a king, he now had the experience of putting into Latin his nation's appeal to two living monarchs for peace and friendship. His translation expressed with dignity the desires of the infant Republic. The pariah spoke proud Latin.[54]

The proudest moment, the greatest challenge of Milton's public career had come to him not long before he penned these letters. In the minutes of the Council of State for 8 January 1650 the event was noted, briefly and simply, as an order: 'That Mr. Milton do prepare something in answer to the book of Salmasius, and when he hath done it bring it to the Council.' For the impact of this order on Milton, we must look to his own account of the occasion. He was present, he tells us, at the Council meeting that day. They had earlier discussed the lengthy and formidable *Defensio Regia* of Salmasius; on 29 November they had taken steps to prevent the importation of the dangerous book. Only an effective reply in Latin, however, could stop the mischief being done in European capitals; and once the Council realized the need, their nomination of a spokesman for the Republic was spontaneous and unanimous.[55]

John Milton, Englishman, proudly accepted what seemed his destiny.

This was 'the fit opportunity' so long awaited, so certain, eventually, to come. This time he would be addressing, not the ignorant stall-readers of London, but the learned men of the whole world. This time he would be answering, not a nameless pamphleteer, but one (to use Milton's own words) 'of whose erudition the opinion of mankind could go no higher'. This time, if God granted him the strength, he would overwhelm the forces of evil, and succour a grateful nation.

If we would understand what Milton meant by 'the fit opportunity', a backward glance may help. He always loved controversy, let it be said, not wisely but too well. His intelligence (and, on several occasions, his friends) told him that a dramatic struggle must have mighty opposites, but he could seldom resist the urge to answer a noisy scribbler who through malice or fury descended to personalities. He guarded resentfully the reputation which he hoped, some day, to own. In his *Apology* of 1642 and *Colasterion* of 1645 he had the unpleasant suspicion that he was slashing away at nonentities, but tried to persuade himself that he was really fighting Bishop Hall and the Reverend Joseph Caryl. Ordered to write *Eikonoklastes*, he declared in his opening sentences, with a frankness that infuriated Royalists: 'No man ever gained much honour by writing against a king, as not usually meeting with that force of argument in such courtly antagonists which to convince might add to his reputation' (63). Although insulting, he was perfectly sincere; he had never met a worthy antagonist in print. Confident of his powers, he was also quite aware of the fact that having appeared as an author for eight years, and having become 'known to no small number of persons', he was nevertheless far from famous. Explaining his comparative obscurity, he later said: 'The truth is, I had learned to be long silent, to be able to forbear writing . . . and carry locked within me that which if I had chosen then to bring forth, I could long ago have gained a name. But I was not eager for fame, which is slow-footed . . . It was not fame of anything that I was waiting for, but the fit opportunity' (VIII. 112). On 8 January 1650 the fit opportunity came.

When it came, there were persons who tried to dissuade him. Some, standing in understandable awe of the celebrated Salmasius, feared that any reply must prove inadequate, and that Milton could only harm, not help, his country's cause. Such objections he dismissed as cowardly; others he ignored as prompted by envy of his appointed role. Not so easily dismissed were the grave warnings of his physicians. Having practically lost the use of his left eye, he would very soon forfeit both, they told him, if he undertook so studious a labour. His health, moreover, was poor. He knew, before beginning, that he would have to write piecemeal, breaking off almost every hour. Even if he were willing to sacrifice his eyes, there remained the question of physical endurance. Was his strength sufficient?[56]

The question was not rhetorical, nor did it savour of self-dramatization.

In Milton's view, the only possible reply to Salmasius was a work of scholarship sounder and broader than the *Defensio Regia*. Every argument, every historical example, every book or document mentioned by Salmasius must be examined in its true context, and somehow refuted. In addition, the vast treasury of human learning must be further ransacked in defence of regicide. This foreign champion of kings, so widely famed for erudition, must be overwhelmed, God willing, by native English erudition, displayed by a servant of the Republic. Did not the exiled Royalists boast that all culture, all learning, had departed with them? Was there not a canard, spread by the Cavaliers and sadly current abroad, that England's new governors were a gang of unlettered shopkeepers? Answers to Salmasius might be expected, but not an answer that smothered him in his own coin. Europe would see England through different eyes if the bookish *Defensio Regia* were met with a richer library of impugnment. The boldest attack was the best, and Milton proposed nothing less than a thorough confutation of the 400 and some pages that damaged his country in the opinion of the Continent.[57]

Facing the great decision, and looking back over his forty-one years of devotion to learning, it seemed to him that his entire life had been a providential preparation for this one task. While others had defended England against tyranny, he had persisted in his endless search for knowlege—to be ready, so the event proved, for the unexpected and glorious office of defending the defenders. The most eminent men of the Commonwealth—statesmen, warriors, leaders of affairs—had not hesitated in their choice. The crisis had come, and Milton was the man. They needed the help that only he could provide. He bowed to destiny, with a smile of recognition: 'Their decision, certainly, I count a great honour to myself—that they voted me, before all others, the one to render this never-to-be-regretted assistance to the brave liberators of my nation. And indeed from my youth onward I had been fired with a zeal that kept urging me, if not to do great deeds myself, at least to celebrate them.' In his unfinished *History of Britain* he had already asserted his belief that 'worthy deeds are not often destitute of worthy relaters, as by a certain fate great acts and great eloquence have most commonly gone hand in hand, equalling and honouring each other in the same ages'. As for the threat of blindness, he later expressed his attitude in these words:

> It seemed to me that, by a certain fatality in my birth, two destinies were set before me: on the one hand, blindness; on the other, duty—that I must of necessity suffer the loss of my eyes, or desert a supreme duty. . . . And so I remembered that there were many who had purchased a less good with a greater evil, glory with death, whereas I, on the contrary, proposed to purchase a greater good with a less evil, that is, at the price of blindness only, to perform one of the noblest acts of duty. Duty, being essentially more substantial even than glory, ought, therefore, to be more desired and venerated. And so I decided that the use

of light, which would be allowed me so short a time, ought to be enjoyed with the greatest possible service to my countrymen.

Not recklessly, but in a spirit of solemn appraisal, he accepted the tremendous assignment.[58]

The first step, of course, was to study the *Defensio Regia* itself. As a piece of flagrant propaganda the book demanded close inspection, but a glance discovered its pretensions as literature. To Milton it seemed a monstrosity—a flatulent, misshapen monstrosity. Except for an inflammatory preface, the first half of the volume (chapters one to seven) was largely a tedious, laborious argument for absolute monarchy on the basis of historical precedent. Beginning with the Bible, and plodding through ancient and medieval history, Salmasius had attempted to show that kings have always been above the judgement of their subjects and answerable only to God. His demonstration was swollen with quotations from Greek and Latin authors; it was pretentious and repetitious. In the second half (chapters eight to twelve) he turned to England, expounding English law, tracing English history, and exhibiting the regicides as criminals. Having encompassed all civilization and proved it absolutist, he damned the English Republic as a stain on the story of humanity.

This, in brief, was the book that had elated Royalists everywhere, and several aspects of it exasperated Milton to the point of cold fury. First was the fact that a prominent foreigner, whose proper sphere was anything but politics, should not only presume to speak as an authority on the rights of kings, but also babble about English laws and condemn another nation for its political conduct. As if such insufferable meddling were not enough, Salmasius had lacked the grace to discuss the matter academically. The lofty scholar had descended to the abusive language of violent partisanship, denouncing the Independents and their leaders as wicked, sacrilegious, lawless, and infamous. The Puritans, he had declared, 'issued forth out of the darkness of hell'. The Independents were a 'pestilence'. Moreover, not content with such insults, not content with being an international busybody, this infuriating foreigner had openly incited the kingdoms and republics of Europe to punish the regicides with fire and sword. His book was a provocation to war.

'He who is so forward to speak ill of others', Milton decided, 'should be treated to a taste of his own medicine.' He determined to give the loose-mouthed incendiary a tongue-lashing he would never forget. The answer of the Republic should not only confute the arguments of Salmasius, but also reveal their author in his true light. This redoubtable scholar, this invincible adversary, he would prove to be a meddling and malicious pedant, 'copious of words and empty of matter'.[59]

Milton never quite understood what another type of mind likes to call 'avoiding personalities'. What had politeness to do with serious controversy? Causes were people; and why should people be distinguished from the causes to which they gave, not vitality only, but human vice or human virtue? Causes must be judged by the people who espoused them, for without their human substance, causes had scant reality. It was incredible that a bad cause could be defended by other than a bad man. It followed, therefore, that an attack on a bad cause invited, while it did not necessitate, a personal attack on the cause's advocate. If the advocate was conspicuous enough to have identified himself with the cause in the eyes of many, then an attack on the cause and an attack on the person amounted to practically the same thing. If the cause could be injured through the person, what more appropriate? When fighting evil as spoken by the Devil, Milton saw no reason to 'avoid personalities'. And only devils spoke evil. As the Lady had said in *Comus*: 'None but such as are good men can give good things'.[60]

Whatever one may think of this view, in fairness to Milton it should be remembered that he expected its application to himself. He was always ready to have his own life judged by what he had written, or his compositions judged by his life. They were, in his opinion, two expressions and products of the same urge to virtue; and together, not the one or the other, they presented the external man. Having early adopted this as an ideal, he came in time to regard it as a moral standard by which either life or literature could be fairly criticized. A man and what he put on paper were inseparable. If he wrote things not true, he was a liar or a hypocrite. If he took a wrong but popular side, he was a weakling or a coward. If his book was reprehensible, he was a reprehensible person for writing it. Just as John Milton could not pen noble verse without first making his own life a true poem, so Claudius Salmasius, in Milton's opinion, could not defend absolute monarchy without being both ignorant and vicious. The world's praise to the contrary notwithstanding, this man must be a fraud as a scholar. It remained only to find and publish the proof.

Meanwhile, there were many other demands upon Milton's time and attention, as he knew there would be. A second edition of *The Tenure of Kings* was needed—not as a result of any replies, but simply because of afterthoughts. The work had attracted very little attention in print. There were marginal references to it in tracts called *The Discoverer* (1649) and *A Discourse concerning the Engagement* (1650),[61] and John Goodwin had alluded specifically to seventeen of Milton's forty-two pages of 'authority and power' in his *Obstructours of Justice* (1649)[62]—a book which, eleven years later, would have the alarming distinction of being named with two works by Milton in proclamations calling them in for public burning. In another recent publication, the writer of the preface had said: 'In truth it is very hard to write good English, and few have attained its height in this last fry of books but Mr. Milton.'[63] A news journal had also contained a favourable notice of *Eikonoklastes* not long after its publication.[64] But such praise was rare. To others, the notorious author of the divorce tracts had been sarcastically expected to produce the same kind of 'good tenets' in his *Eikonoklastes*,[65] and Clement Walker, damning all Independents, had damned *The Tenure of Kings* as, appropriately, the work of 'a libertine that thinketh his wife a manacle, and his very garters to be shackles and fetters to him, one that (after the Independent fashion) will be tied by no obligation to God or man'.[66] Walker was arrested, and Milton was given a hand in convicting him, but he had expressed an attitude that was to haunt the public official who, as one Royalist rimed it in 1649, had encouraged 'the froward Miltonist' who would, much too easily, the 'nuptial knot untwist'.[67] An old enemy, Joseph Hall, had seemingly chosen early April of 1649 to make the Council of State perhaps question the wisdom of its recent appointment: 'I have heard too much of, and once saw, a licentious pamphlet thrown abroad in these lawless times in the defence and encouragement of divorces, not to be sued out—that solemnity needed not—but to be arbitrarily given by the disliking husband to his displeasing and unquiet wife . . . Woe is me! To what a pass is the world come that a Christian, pretending to reformation, should dare to tender so loose a project to the public?'[68]

Milton paid no attention to any of these comments when he prepared *The Tenure* for another edition. Not wanting to bother with a thorough revision, he made about a dozen slight additions within the text, changed the wording in a few places, and then supplied his printer with enough supplementary material to fill thirteen extra pages. The revisions strengthened but in no way modified the argument. For example, he added a statement of Aristotle, cited early Puritan opinion on tyrants, and turned a concession into a cause: 'Perhaps till now no Protestant state or kingdom can be alleged to have openly put to death their king, which lately some have written [Salmasius, for one], and imputed to their great glory, much mistaking the matter. It is not, neither ought [it] to be, the glory of a Protestant state never to have put their king to death; it is the glory of a Protestant king never to have deserved death' (41). The supplementary material, printed at the end of the new edition, derived from his reading during the months that had intervened. He was able to bring to the support of his thesis the testimonies of such eminent Protestant divines as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Bucer, Zwinglius, Paraeus, Dudley Fenner, Christopher Goodman, Anthony Gilby, and Thomas Cartwright. He argued, moreover, that there was justification of regicide implicit in the logic of the early Presbyterian manifesto, *Scripture and Reason Pleaded for Defensive Arms* (1643).[69]

The second edition of *The Tenure* was published some time before 15 February 1650.[70] Apart from its evidence of Milton's continued reading on the subject, the new pamphlet was remarkable for its sustained hostility toward the Presbyterians. In sad contrast to 'the true Protestant divines of England', said its author, 'there arose a covetous and ambitious generation of divines (for divines they call themselves) who, feigning on a sudden to be new converts and proselytes from Episcopacy, under which they had long temporized, opened their mouths at length in show against pluralities and prelacy, but with intent to swallow them down both, gorging themselves like harpies on those simonious places and preferments of their outed predecessors, as the quarry for which they hunted, not to plurality only, but to multiplicity' (52). This 'subprelatical' (58) faction of Presbyterians, he concluded, have 'seized upon the pulpit as the stronghold and fortress of their sedition and rebellion against the civil magistrate, whose friendly and victorious hand having rescued them from the bishops, their insulting lords, fed them plenteously both in public and in private, raised them to be high and rich, of poor and base—only suffered not their covetousness and fierce ambition, which, as the pit that sent out their fellow locusts, hath been ever bottomless and boundless, to interpose in all things, and over all persons, their impetuous ignorance and importunity' (59). The second edition, like the first, was signed only with the writer's initials—initials now more easily recognized by readers interested in politics.

Milton was, of course, reappointed Secretary for Foreign Languages on 18 February 1650, when the Council of State, with five substitutions in its membership by vote of Parliament, began its second year as a governing body of the Republic.[71] At its meeting on this day, the new Council also took additional steps to prevent the importation of copies of the *Defensio Regia*.[72] Milton, presumably, had already begun work on his reply to this book, but the chore of checking references and detecting error was very slow and laborious. His superiors continued to call upon him for various services as the year progressed. During the first six months he was ordered to translate into Latin at least eight letters to foreign powers. In addition to the letter of credence for Richard Bradshaw as English resident to Hamburg (2 April),[73] and a subsequent letter (31 May) requesting his protection against Royalist exiles,[74] there was correspondence addressed to two kings and to Prince Leopold, governor of the Spanish provinces in Belgium.[75] King John IV of Portugal was twice asked by the English (24 February[76] and 27 April[77]) to expel piratical Royalists from his territory, or to co-operate with the two fleets of the Republic, under Admirals Blake and Popham, in their efforts to protect English interests abroad. King Philip IV of Spain was also informed of the navy's movements (27 April);[78] and then, after the shocking news of Anthony Ascham's murder in Madrid, he was sternly requested to punish the assassins without delay (28 June[79] and, perhaps, 1 July[80]).

First Dorislaus—and now Ascham! Milton remembered the letter of credence he had prepared for Ascham, on 4 February. Death was too often the certainty in England's unsure diplomacy.[81] Salmasius might grin at these bloody events, but there would be a time for vengeance.

On 4 July the Parliament gave a warm welcome to Charles Vane, safely home from his brief mission to Portugal.[82]

The mainstay of a faltering foreign policy now lay with the republican navy, which dominated the Atlantic off the coast of Portugal, capturing Portuguese ships in the Brazilian trade, but chiefly waiting for Prince Rupert's fleet to come out of the Tagus and fight. A decisive naval victory would go far to make republican ambassadors welcome in foreign capitals. Cromwell's successful campaigns in Ireland had generated the premature confidence which had sent Ascham to death in Spain, and Vane to great danger in Lisbon. The Irish, although not completely vanquished, were no longer a threat; and it was also clear that Charles II would never land among them to menace England. When Cromwell and Ireton had sailed for Ireland, in August 1649, only Dublin and Londonderry were in republican hands. But a notorious 'no quarter' policy, and notable victories at Drogheda, Wexford, Kilkenny, and Clonmel, had practically solved the Irish problem for the time; and when Cromwell returned in triumph to London, on 31 May 1650, it was no secret that his next mission lay to the north.

Scotland, although more solidly Presbyterian than ever, was the best hope of resurgent Royalism. The Scots were horrified, not only by the killing of the King, but also by the sectarian anarchy to which they attributed it; and having promptly proclaimed Charles II, they had since wrestled grimly with his soul, determined to convert him to support the Covenant. While the twenty-year-old monarch listened politely to the godly men sent to reason with him, and carefully avoided any definite commitment, he heard, too, the distressing news from Ireland. Could Scotland be his without the Covenant? The only Scotsman who encouraged so bold a hope was James Graham, the brave and dashing Marquis of Montrose. Fresh from his special labour of inciting the northern counties against the rebel government in England, this imaginative courtier invaded his native land to make the great attempt. But the Scots regarded him as a traitor, and the people did not rally to his picturesque standard as he had fondly dreamed. His forces were surprised and defeated late in April, and he himself was soon captured. On 21 May he was executed in Edinburgh. A month later, on 24 June, King Charles landed in Scotland, having already taken the Covenant. If the Scots were to help in punishing England, concessions were necessary to their convictions. On 16 August, twenty-five days after Cromwell crossed the Tweed and threatened Edinburgh, Charles signed a declaration in which he made even further concessions.

When news reached London of the Declaration of 16 August, Milton was just finishing his reply to the second of the twelve chapters of the *Defensio Regia*. Progress had been painfully slow. His health was still wretched, and his left eye was useless. Working little by little, trying to conserve his slender energies, he had completed, we may assume, an analysis of Salmasius's argument, and had made his notes of refutation. It is also likely that some—perhaps the major part—of the necessary reading was now behind him. His method of attack involved a careful check of references and quotations made by Salmasius, and, all in all, there were more than a hundred books which had to be consulted. Many of these were probably in his own collection, but visits to the library of Sion College, or to the former King's Library at St. James's (now called 'the Public Library'), were almost certainly requisite to the labour of research. Perhaps he also visited Oxford[83] or Cambridge. His routine duties as a secretary of the Council brought interruptions, of course, beyond those forced by his physical limitations. For example, twice during May he was ordered to investigate the papers of persons suspected of delinquency.[84] He may even have volunteered for such an assignment on 25 June, when he was ordered to search the rooms of William Prynne at Lincoln's Inn.[85] On the same day, having brought to the Council the army's records on insurrections in Essex and Kent, he was ordered to study them, to 'take heads of the same', and to report his findings.[86]

There are reasons, however, for believing that Milton's superiors eventually recognized his difficulties and took steps to free his time for the tremendous task with which they had entrusted him. Although state letters of his translating survive from every month between January and 1 July, there are none for the months of July, August, September, and October.[87] On 26 June he was asked to supply a Latin translation of Parliament's *Declaration of the Causes of War with the Scots*, but this assignment, we happen to know, was subsequently transferred to Thomas May.[88] On 14 August he was ordered, along with a group of five ministers, to inventory the numberless documents of the now inactive Westminster Assembly; but Gualter Frost was named as an alternative representative of the Council in case Milton could not serve.[89] As the year drew to a close, he was asked to prepare only two letters, both very brief, to the Governor of Andalusia (7 November)[90] and to the newly arrived Portuguese envoy (*c.* 18 December).[91] The Council was even thoughtful of its secretary's personal comfort: on 14 June they voted him a warrant to the trustees and contractors for the sale of the royal goods, insuring delivery of 'such hangings as shall be sufficient for the furnishing of his lodgings in Whitehall'.[92]

One month later, Mary Milton was again pregnant, and her husband's hopes were again revived. Would the next child be a boy? Without pretending to know a man's prayers, we may assume that Milton, like his father before him, yearned for a son and heir. The Phillips boys were now almost grown men, and would soon be having children of their own. There were disadvantages to marrying late. Christopher already had a fine family, with sons to teach and talk to. On the other hand, though little

Anne Milton was four years old, her physical and perhaps mental handicaps made her more of a care than a comfort to her father. The baby, Mary, not quite two, still required constant attention. The answer to Salmasius was composed amidst various domestic worries and concerns.

The manuscript was almost if not entirely ready by 23 December, when the Council gave an official order for its printing. On 31 December it was registered at Stationers' Hall for publication 'both in Latin and English'.[93] It was perhaps Milton himself, remembering the unhappy experience of the divorce tracts, which he thoroughly regretted having published in the vernacular, who argued that this book should appear in Latin only. More likely his miserable health forbade the labour of translation, and it was unthinkable that the English should be that of another stylist.

Because Salmasius had written a 'Defence of the King of England', Milton called his reply 'A Defence of the People of England'. He was thinking, however, not of the whole people, and certainly not of the fickle, irresponsible rabble, but rather of those sturdy, responsible citizens who could show character and initiative in times of challenge. He had discovered, and was ready to admit, that 'there are a few, and those of great wisdom and courage, that either desire or deserve liberty. Most men by far prefer just masters—masters, note, but just ones' (74). To the Salmasian charge that the English were not truly free men, Milton in all candour confessed that his countrymen had indeed learned disgraceful habits of mind under the prelates. 'Nor have they been able to unlearn them suddenly, while yet in the wilderness, though under God's immediate government. But there is hope of many among us' (178). Specifically, the people of England whose rectitude he was proud to defend were 'the middle sort, amongst whom the wisest men and most skilful in affairs are generally found. The rest are most commonly diverted from achieving excellence and from the study of laws and government—on the one hand by luxury and wealth, on the other hand by poverty and want' (392). When Salmasius called the common people of England an excitable, changeable, ignorant lot, incapable of governing themselves, Milton merely agreed. But when Salmasius sneered that England's new leaders were 'scarcely noble', Milton retorted that the middle class had produced men who, 'being as it were their own ancestors, tread the path to true nobility by way of industry and personal worth'. Such, he insisted, 'are comparable with any the "noblest" soever' (32).

On Monday, 24 February 1651, from the press of William Dugard,[94] there finally appeared the 228 quarto pages of *Joannis Miltoni, Angli, Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio, contra Claudii Anonymi, aliàs Salmasii, Defensionem Regiam.*[95] The book displayed on its title page the arms of the new Commonwealth, and the name of its author in large capitals. Milton's little joke in the title was intended, of course, to attract attention and to promise further humour inside. The authorship of the anonymous *Defensio Regia* was no secret; indeed, most of the force of the attack against the Republic had depended upon the prestige of its writer. Milton, therefore, was ironic in his reference to this 'Claudius Anonymous, otherwise well known as Salmasius'.

Here was fun, here was delicious food for gossip, wherever the learned were gathered. Here was a new topic for lively correspondence among sophisticates in a dozen far-flung cities. A scholarly reputation was being ridiculed! Salmasius had his enemies; he had stirred up envy; there were those who long had thought him swollen with a measureless conceit. And now, how exciting, how unexpected and wonderful, to find the haughty one refuted in his own language and with his own weapons! Who was this unknown Englishman who had dared to answer 'an adversary of so great a name'?[96]

Milton treated his famed opponent with studied contempt throughout his rebuttal. Salmasius was a stupid and wordy pedant, harmless enough when editing classical manuscripts, but ignorantly misleading when meddling in political matters. Uxorious at home, he was arrogant abroad. Cursed with the small soul and copious vocabulary of a grammarian, he knew nothing of humane letters. He had defended the late King for a hundred gold Jacobuses, and the brilliance of his argument was reflected in the very title of his book, 'A Royal Defence for Charles I, to Charles II'. How clever, to plead the father's cause before his own son! A hundred Jacobuses to one that wins such a case! And such sincerity, defending the English prelates along with their royal patron! In some of his earlier works, to be sure, Salmasius had attacked Episcopacy, even argued the benefits of removing it; but it was convenient, no doubt, for him to change his mind. Why should one expect consistency from so great a man? The Royal Defence was full of contradictions—and full of pretentious nonsense. If it had been written in English and published in England, no one would have taken it seriously. Unfortunately, some persons not acquainted with English laws and affairs have supposed that Salmasius knew what he was talking about, despite his silliness and verbosity. An answer, therefore, was deemed expedient.

This is the attitude that Milton takes toward his distinguished antagonist. He twits and taunts Salmasius on every possible count, correcting his Hebrew, criticizing his Latin, mocking his knowledge of history. He knows where the man is most sensitive, if not most vulnerable:

> A learned one? You, that even into your old age seem rather to have turned over phrasebooks and lexicons and glossaries than to have conned good authors with judgement or profit—so that you prate of nothing but manuscripts and variant readings and dislocated passages and scribal errors, and prove that you have never tasted a drop of more substantial learning! A wise man? You, that used to carry on your beggarly disputes about the meanest trifles? . . . And yet you snarl in

> anger because everyone calls you a grammarian. . . . Take notice, now, how much I, one of those Englishmen that you have the impudence to call 'madmen, unlearned, ignoble, wicked', scorn and despise you. . . . You *are* a grammarian, and nothing but a grammarian. [66–68]

Such is Milton's defence through invective. Following is a sample of his defence through argument:

> First you said the Hebrews preferred tyrants to judges; now, in this passage, you say they preferred judges to tyrants, and 'a tyrant was the thing they least desired . . .' What you say next is very true: 'The supreme power was then in the people, as appears by their rejecting judges and choosing a king.' Remember this when I shall ask you for it again! It is not true, you declare, that 'God in His anger gave the Israelites a king as a tyrant or a punishment, but as a thing good and profitable'. But that is easily refuted, for why should they cry to God because of the king that they had chosen, were it not that royal government was an evil—not in itself, but because most commonly (even as the prophet here warns) it does degenerate into pride and tyranny? If you are not yet satisfied, acknowledge your own words, acknowledge your own printed bond, and blush: in your *Apparatus ad Primatum* you said, 'God gave them a king in His anger . . .' [122–4]

'The man contradicts himself so perpetually', Milton exclaims, 'that contradiction seems his twin-born sister!' (178). He enjoys quoting Salmasius and then declaring, 'Now, as usual, I will turn your own authorities against you' (146). Defence is hardly the appropriate word for Milton's *Defensio*; he counter-attacks with violence, and his weapon is scholarship barbed with sarcasm.

The bulk of the *Defensio* is detailed, point-by-point refutation of the arguments of Salmasius, and it needs no summary here for a reader to skip. More precedents are noted, and more authorities cited, than in *The Tenure of Kings* or *Eikonoklastes*, but the justification of regicide is essentially the same. 'Our liberty is not Caesar's; it is God's own birthday gift to us' (150). Kings derive their powers from a people naturally free, and are not above law or judgement. Milton writes, he repeats, 'not out of any hatred of kings, but of tyrants' (550). Salmasius, despite protestations to the contrary, defends tyrants in the process of defending kings. This is the real issue between them. But it rarely emerges; Milton is too busy denying everything and pouring ridicule upon his opponent.

There are comparatively few passages in the *Defensio* which are of special interest to the student of Milton's developing convictions. Again he damns the Presbyterians for their hypocrisy; again he expounds the spirit of true liberty. His argument here for the separation of Church and State is significant, however, for its explanation of his lifelong hatred of Roman Catholicism: 'Men first entered into a polity in order to live safe and free, without suffering violence or wrong. They entered into a church in order to live piously and religiously. The former has its laws; the latter, its doctrine and discipline, quite distinct. It is because the magistracy and the church confuse their jurisdictions that for so many years war has sown a harvest of more war throughout Christendom. This, too, is why we cannot endure popery, for we perceive it to be not so much a religion as a pontifical despotism decked out under the pretence of religion with the spoils of civil power' (34). On the other hand, to Milton it seems obvious that God 'would have the same reformation made in the commonwealth as in the church, especially if it has been put to the proof that the assigning of infallibility and omnipotency to man is the identical cause of all the evils in both' (210).

To the effrontery of Salmasius in expounding English law, Milton replies, not only with scorching invective, but also with learned demonstration of the foreigner's inadequate knowledge. In this section of his *Defensio* he may have been aided by such men as John Bradshaw, Bulstrode Whitelocke, Henry Rolle, Oliver St. John, and John Lisle, all members of the Council of State, and all eminent lawyers. For other sections, however, it is unlikely that he required the assistance of anyone. Milton's knowledge of the Bible and biblical exegesis, his acquaintance with both ecclesiastical and secular history, were powers profoundly his own. When Salmasius musters an impressive array of Church Fathers in defence of absolute monarchy, one can almost hear Milton mutter his old disgust. He lectures his opponent briefly on the weakness of such evidence —as he had lectured the prelates nine years before—and after correcting Salmasius on a few specific points, he dismisses the Fathers thus: 'Whatever they say which is not warranted by the authority of Scripture, or by good and sufficient reason, has no more weight with me than if some ordinary man had said it' (246).[97]

It is interesting to note Milton's justification of Pride's Purge, that pivotal event in the war against the King. Salmasius had charged, of course, that this was military insurrection without popular support, that not the hundred thousandth part of the people had consented to the final judgement against their sovereign. In reply Milton held it manifestly false that a whole nation of warlike people could have been subdued by a few men. The act, therefore, could not have been done against the popular will. He remembered, moreover, 'with how unexpected an importunity and fervency of mind, and with how unanimous a consent, the whole army and a great part of the people from almost every county in the kingdom cried out for justice' (50). On the other hand, when wicked members of Parliament attempted to block this popular movement by restoring the royal enemy, 'then the sounder part of the House, finding themselves and the Commonwealth betrayed, implored the aid of the army, valiant and ever faithful to the Commonwealth. Whereon I can observe only this: that our soldiers showed better judgement than our senators, and saved the Commonwealth by their arms when the others by their votes had almost ruined it' (54). Still, it was the people who had acted in effect: 'For whatever the better—that is, the sounder—part of the legislature did, in which the true power of the people rested, why may not the people be said to have done it? What if the majority of the legislature should choose to be slaves, or to set the government to sale? Ought not the minority prevent this, and keep their liberty, if it be in their power?' (356). Such was the argument. It amounted to saying that an enlightened minority, with power to overcome a mistaken majority, is the best representative of the people.

Milton felt, although he did not admit, the dangers in this subjective interpretation of history. He believed wholeheartedly in the people's right to punish a tyrant; he believed, furthermore, that Charles had been a tyrant, and hence most rightly punished. But he did not believe in government by coercion; he did not believe in permanent rule by a minority. Justice had been done; the people had been well served; but it was now the people's opportunity, and awful responsibility, to *deserve* the freedom which had been given them. Milton ended his *Defensio*, therefore, not with a final rebuke to Salmasius, not with a plea to foreign observers, but with solemn advice and still more solemn warning for the English people themselves:

> After so glorious a deed, you ought to think, you ought to do, nothing that is mean and petty, nothing but what is great and sublime. To attain such praise there is only one way: as you have subdued your enemies in the field, so you shall prove that unarmed and surrounded by peace you of all mankind have highest courage to subdue what conquers the other nations of men—faction, avarice, the temptations of wealth, and the corruptions that wait upon prosperity . . . But if you prove to be of another mind—which the good Lord forbid!—if, having been valiant in war, you should grow debauched in peace; if, having had such visible demonstrations of the goodness of God to yourselves and of His wrath against your enemies, you have not learned by so eminent and memorable an example before your eyes to fear God and work righteousness, I for my part shall truly grant and confess, for I shall not be able to deny, that the worst which slanderers and liars now speak or think of you is true. And in a little time you will find God far more wrathful against you than either your enemies have found Him embittered or you have found Him gracious and favourable beyond all nations at this time on earth. [552–4]

Coming as they do at the end of the long argument, these words have a tone of weary foreboding.

Yet Milton was still hopeful. His natural optimism, fortified by an informed confidence in England's present leaders, had, in fact, been further stimulated by the experience of answering Salmasius. He had always believed that Truth must eventually prevail, and now he was about to prove it, in single combat with the chief spokesman of Error. He had been told that the States of Holland, deferring to diplomatic propriety or pressure, had suppressed the book of his opponent; but the author of *Areopagitica* begged the Dutch to rescind their order and allow the

*Defensio Regia* to circulate freely. 'For if I shall have made clear to everyone what idle talk and ignorance and deceit it is stuffed with, then the more widely it circulates, the more straitly, I think, it will be suppressed.' As for its grammarian author, Milton dismissed him with a contemptuous prophecy: 'You senseless, witless, bawling pettifogger, born only to pick good writers to pieces or to transcribe them, do you really think yourself capable of penning anything that will live?—you whom posterity, believe me, will damn to oblivion with all your scribbled trumpery. Except, perhaps, your *Defensio Regia* will turn out to be something beholden to my answer to it, and, after long slumbering unread, be once more handled' (40). Truer words were never written in vitriol than these.

On the other hand, time has dealt severely with Milton's own book. Even before Latin had ceased to be a living language, men had lost interest in both the method and the substance of the argument with Salmasius, and they had found but little of that granite of first principles which survives the erosion of shifting taste. Although Milton believed the *Defensio* his greatest prose work, posterity has considered it one of his poorest. Who displayed the greater learning, he or Salmasius? Who wrote the better Latin? For some years these questions were matter for lively discussion. Today no one cares. Today we concern ourselves with another sort of question, the significance of the *Defensio* in his total development as an artist. And it is now fairly obvious that, while Milton deliberately staggered Salmasius in the realm of political debate, Salmasius unwittingly trapped Milton in the realm of literature, goading him to produce one of the dullest, most pedestrian of all his writings. Because the English *Defensio* trails another book from point to point, it is as shapeless, repetitious, and tedious as the work it rightly accuses of being shapeless, repetitious, and tedious. Truly, Milton stooped to conquer. It is not only that he mixed great scholarship and gross scurrility, for this we might have forgiven had he, besides, lifted the argument above the plodding, authority-quoting, precedent-hunting level on which he found it. But the *Defensio* is as uninspired, artistically, as a collection of rough notes. Even its anger fails to animate it, beyond an occasional burst of eloquent sarcasm. Too many of its pages contain, not discussion of principles, not even personal thought or emotion, but torn-up references hurled at another man's head. The controversy sounds like a bookish brawl, a quarrel in a library.

Whatever be the judgement of posterity, it is still important for us to remember Milton's own estimate of his performance. He did not, of course, think of himself as hunting the needle of analogy in a hundred arid haystacks; he thought of himself as painting a vast panorama of political science and world history, against which the achievements of his countrymen could be admired in true perspective. He thought of himself as vindicating, with consummate scholarship, a cause 'of all causes the most noble'. Indeed, early in the *Defensio* he glowingly promised a majestic narrative, a record of deathless deeds for the reading of all nations and all ages. This was his primary aim; the argument of controversial defence was his 'next best task'. If he had given us such a memorable narrative, our judgement of his total accomplishment might well be different; but recent history, as we actually meet it in the *Defensio*, is stuttering and quarrelsome. There is no sustained account. By breaking the record into fragments, and using those fragments for tedious confutation, Milton simply failed to move us. Yet he seems to have satisfied himself.

Some time after June of 1650, probably late in the year or early in 1651, when work on the *Defensio* was finished, a second edition of *Eikonoklastes* was published.[98] The first edition had been printed by Matthew Simmons of Aldersgate Street, who had also handled both editions of *The Tenure of Kings* and the official *Observations* on Ireland. Simmons and Milton had been associated in publishing since 1643, when *The Doctrine of Divorce* had appeared from the presses jointly owned by Simmons and Thomas Paine. For some reason, however, the revised edition of *Eikonoklastes* was produced by another printer, Thomas Newcomb. Although 'much enlarged', the text consisted of 230 quarto pages, whereas in the original edition it had filled 242 pages; the saving of space was effected, of course, by closer printing. Milton was evidently satisfied; he continued to employ Newcomb for some years to come.[99]

Although the new material is conspicuous in only about nine or ten chapters of the revised *Eikonoklastes*, few of the twenty-eight escaped at least slight revision of spelling, punctuation, or phraseology. Both argument and documentation were strengthened, and the details of history were supplemented at a number of points. The most important additions were made in the preface, the concluding chapter, and the digression on the King's prayer. The last-named feature of Milton's reply had created a stir: 'And since there be a crew of lurking railers who in their libels and their fits of railing up and down, as I hear from others, take it so currishly that I should dare to tell abroad the secrets of their Egyptian Apis, to gratify their gall in some measure yet more . . . I shall gorge them once more with this digression somewhat larger than before, nothing troubled or offended at the working upward of their sale-venom thereupon, though it happen to asperse me' (86). He added, as a matter of fact, a considerable amount, emphasizing the King's deception, casting suspicion on the sources of the other prayers in the *Eikon Basilike*, and laughing at the pretended holiness of the people's 'chief saint and martyr' (90).

The essential argument of the book was unmodified by revision. Milton continued to defend, on the one hand, 'men by nature free, born and created with a better title to their freedom than any king hath to his crown' (255), and to deplore, on the other hand, the vulgar who seemed, 'like a credulous and hapless herd, begotten to servility' (309). The hypocritical *Eikon* was, he knew, still adored by 'an ingrateful and perverse generation, who having first cried to God to be delivered from their King, now murmur against God that heard their prayers, and cry as loud for their King against those that delivered them' (71–72). As for his *Eikonoklastes*, he admitted that 'well it might have seemed in vain to write at all . . . so advantageous to a book it is only to be a king's'. He renewed his attack, confessing it to be 'an irksome labour to write with industry and judicious pains that which neither weighed nor well read shall be judged without industry or the pains of well judging, by faction and the easy literature of custom and opinion' (65). In so far as the King had presented a case, Milton had refuted him, he was certain, easily and singlehanded. He admitted as much in the *Defensio* against Salmasius (VII. 8). Nevertheless, he renewed his attack.

In a long passage added to the end of his earlier preface, he emphasized the King's unrepentant spirit. Even facing death Charles had defended prelacy and had damned the whole work of reformation. Yet the peculiar Presbyterians actually applauded the *Eikon*,

> none appearing all this while to vindicate Church or State from these calumnies and reproaches, but a small handful of men whom they defame and spit at with all the odious names of 'schism' and 'sectarism'. I never knew that time in England when men of truest religion were not counted 'sectaries'; but wisdom now, valour, justice, constancy, prudence, united and embodied to defend religion and our liberties both by word and deed against tyranny, is counted schism and faction. Thus, in a graceless age, things of highest praise and imitation under a right name, to make them infamous and hateful to the people are miscalled. Certainly, if ignorance and perverseness will needs be national and universal, then they who adhere to wisdom and to truth are not therefore to be blamed for being so few as to seem a sect or faction. . . . [73–74]

Milton was proud to be one of 'the sole remainder' selected by God to defend truth and public liberty against 'the vulgar sort' (74). He wished it noted that the *Eikonoklastes*, far from being scandalous, omitted 'all that hath been whispered in the Court or alleged openly of the King's bad actions, it being the proper scope of this work in hand, not to rip up and relate the misdoings of his whole life, but to answer only, and refute, the missayings of his book' (67). These were good intentions and, with a few exceptions (such as repeating gossip that Charles had been involved in the poisoning of his father), Milton lived up to his word. The revised answer to the King's Book was an eloquent and altogether suitable republican document. Many years later, an ardent Royalist reflected: 'It is no extraordinary thing that wicked books which say with a witty malice all that can be said for a bad cause, with a fluent and florid style, are esteemed even by them that condemn them. Upon those terms Milton's wicked book was entertained by friends and foes that were lovers of humane learning, both in England and France.'[100] On 20 May 1651 the Council of State had ordered John Dury to translate it into French, so that its influence might be felt across the Channel.[101]

About April of 1651 there appeared an anonymous reply to Milton's refutation of Charles. It was called *Eikon Aklastos: The Image Unbroken, a Perspective of the Impudence Falsehood, Vanity, and Profaneness Published in a Libel Entitled* '*Eikonoklastes*'.[102] To the student of Milton's reputation this attempt at counter-attack is interesting chiefly for the things it does not say. It is a long, tedious, point-by-point answer, full of pious horror and abuse; but its Royalist author, one Joseph Jane, says nothing about Milton. His book is full of tiresome references to 'this author' and 'the libeller' (with occasional adjectives), but there are no references to 'J. M.', or to the divorce tracts, or even to *The Tenure of Kings*. To the Cornishman Jane 'this author' was somebody 'hatched by rebellion', a mad tool of his masters, but otherwise without personality. Jane mentions John Lilburne, but not John Milton. He was apparently not so well informed as the Royalist weekly, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, which as early as 29 January 1650 had cried 'Shame!' and had informed readers that 'J. M.' was Milton the Divorcer.[103]

Yet in 1651, the year in which *Eikon Aklastos* was published, the name of Milton suddenly became well known to Jane and to all Royalist exiles on the Continent. Soon there were many allusions to *Eikonoklastes*, and soon many people identified its author. By 1653 Jane was even trying to have his feeble reply published in a French translation, although copies of the first edition in English were still unsold. The explanation of all this lies in the simple fact that the *Defensio* against Salmasius had invaded Europe, with memorable consequences.[104]

Printed during the month of January, announced almost ready on 30 January,[105] but probably delayed by Milton's painful difficulties in proof-reading, the *Defensio* finally appeared on 24 February 1651. Within a week, on 5 March, the Council of State instructed its Committee of Examinations to 'give order for reprinting of it as they think fit'.[106] Obviously pleased, the Committee was not long in authorizing a sumptuous *editio emendatior* in folio, with some copies printed on special, heavy paper, suitable for presentation. This was published in London before September.[107] Meanwhile, copies of the original quarto edition had reached a number of European cities and had excited so much interest that the supply was quickly exhausted. The February number of *Hollandse Mercurius*, printed in Haarlem, reported that Dutch, French, and English translations would be available.[108] As early as March, the book was reprinted in duodecimo by Ludovic Elzevir at Leyden (in London, George Thomason acquired a copy of this on 6 April).[109] On 28 April/8 May Nicolas Heinsius reported from Leyden that five different editions were in circulation—the London original, a quarto reprint published at Gouda, and duodecimos from Utrecht, from Elzevir's press at Leyden, and from the press of John Jansson at Amsterdam. By 8/18 May a sixth edition was being hurried through the press at The Hague, a Dutch translation had very recently appeared, and a French translation was expected.[110] No French (or English) translation actually appeared; but Salmasius's book and Milton's reply were bound and sold together, with a joint title page, in Paris.[111] In June the English *Defensio* was publicly burned, and its sale strictly forbidden, in both Paris and Toulouse.[112] A remarkable fact about all of these reprints is that the continental publishers, as if in conspiracy with the English government (or fearing the wrath of their own), kept the 'London-Dugard' imprint—and most of them imitated the device (the Commonwealth arms) on the title page of the original edition. This practice continued in 1652, when there were at least two additional reprintings.[113] Ironically, only the Paris edition gave any indication of where copies might actually be purchased.

Everyone was talking about Milton and his vigorous confutation. When copies reached Leipzig, they were so eagerly sought for and devoured by so many people that Caspar Ziegler complained of not being able to borrow one for even a little while.[114] Copies reached Stockholm on 1 April, and there Isaac Vossius was impressed by the quality of the writing, Queen Christina commented openly on the author's genius and style, and Salmasius, taken completely by surprise, was furious.[115] In Holland and in France the friends and enemies of Salmasius started a flood of rumours. An answer to Milton was reported already in the press by 18 June.[116] Then it was reported not begun.[117] Salmasius had been ill. But by October a story was afloat that the Salmasian reply had been suppressed in Sweden, and would be published in Paris instead.[118] People were wondering, too, about Milton. In Holland, Ludovic Elzevir spoke knowingly of the Englishman's high birth and great wealth.[119] Those acquainted with Milton, however, spread the facts about his family and means, and insisted that he was an affable person, of mild and courteous disposition, despite his severity in the *Defensio*.[120] It became known that he had published a book of verse, a tract on divorce, and an answer to the famous *Eikon Basilike*. At The Hague a publicist named Dirk Graswinckel announced in May his intention of writing a reply to the *Defensio*.[121] He was soon dissuaded (by the Dutch government, it was said),[122] and Salmasius was reported very angry at this political interference.[123] A little later, Graswinckel's 'Vindicias contra Miltonum' was supposed actually published, although, if so, no copy seems to have survived.[124] Rumour meanwhile had connected another reply with Dr. John Bramhall, who had been Bishop of Derry before his retirement to the Continent, and whom rumour had already credited with the wretched *Eikon Aklastos* by Jane.[125] Conjecture about Salmasius's own plans continued, reaching a peak of interest in late August, when the victim of Milton's sarcasm departed Christina's court, eventually returning to Leyden.[126]

In England, Milton and his superiors watched with delight, we may be sure, the sensation they had produced. The *Defensio* was successful beyond all expectations. Printing a series of newsletters from abroad, the semi-official *Mercurius Politicus* reported the discomfiture of Salmasius.[127] 20 February, from Leyden: 'He could wish it to write again, for it was never calculated for this change as is since fallen out.' 20 March, from The Hague: 'I hear Salmasius is not like to live to make any reply to Milton's book, which here is very much applauded.' 28 March, from Amsterdam:

> *Miltoni Defensionem pro Populo Anglicano* I got here lately and perused it with much satisfaction. Tomorrow, God willing, I send it to a counsellor of the Elector of Brandenburg. The author, it seems, is a man of singular parts, acuteness, and solidity. Some perhaps may find fault with the personal jerks therein, but the least review of Salmasius will show what tuned the echo to such a key. I am sure if he lives yet, he will find work enough, and tough, to disentangle himself handsomely in the main.

21 June, from Leyden:

> Salmasius is returning to Leyden from Sweden . . . he thinks his book forgotten now, and believes he hath friends enough still to preserve his place and honour. He tells his confidants here that he will vindicate his name and book from Milton's reply—which book, we hear, is burnt in Toulouse and Paris for fear of making state-heretics. The truth is, that doctrine begins to be studied and disputed more of late, and is pretty taking among such people as they, who, like Issachar's ass, sink under their burdens; and by this policy of the Court, in burning the book, will make it a martyr, whose ashes will be scattered far and wide, and the cause and book be more inquisitively desired.

9 July, from Paris:

> Milton's book hath been burnt by the hands of the common executioner, and with much more solemnity than at Toulouse. It is so far liked and approved by the ingenuous sort of men that all the copies sent hither out of the Low Countries were long since dispersed, and it was designed here for the press—whereof notice being taken, it is made treason for any to print, vend, or have it in possession, so great a hatred is borne to any piece that speaks liberty and freedom to this miserable people.

29 August, from Delft:

> The reason why Salmasius left Sweden was because Milton's book having laid him open so notoriously, he became thereby very much neglected, the Queen not having sent for him nor seen him for the space of two months, so that perceiving a decay of her favour, he came himself and desired leave of departure, which was very readily granted, the Queen having at length understood how impolitic it is for any prince to harbour so pernicious a parasite and promoter of tyranny.[128]

This story, although contradicted by other accounts, Milton and his republican friends readily believed.

The Council's amazing Secretary for Foreign Languages was warmly congratulated upon his achievement. He was regarded as an important personage in the government. Foreigners in London eagerly sought his acquaintance. Ambassadors and lesser diplomatic representatives of foreign princes promptly read the book and praised its author. Some of these foreign dignitaries called upon Milton in his apartment; others invited him to their own houses.[129] One of the most demonstrative of these new admirers was, we may be sure, Joao de Guimaraes, the Portuguese envoy, who had arrived in December of 1650 to negotiate a treaty with England. On 10 February Milton had been ordered to attend all meetings of the special committee appointed by the Council to treat with Guimaraes.[130] Another admirer was doubtless the Spanish ambassador, Alphonso de Cardenas, who had never left his post in London but had only recently been accredited as a legate to the Republic. On 26 July 1651 a distinguished traveller from Germany, Christopher Arnold, wrote to his friend, Dr. Georg Richter, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Altorf, concerning the various English celebrities whom he had met. He mentioned, among others, Selden, Ussher, Francis Junius, and William Petty. Milton, he reported, 'enters readily into talk; his style is pure and his writing most terse'. The 'strenuous defender of the Republic' seemed to him, however, too harsh in his opinion of the older English theologians.[131] Later that year, on 19 November, Arnold persuaded Milton to write in his autograph album, as a souvenir of their acquaintance. Milton obliged by dictating to an amanuensis a modified Greek quotation from 2 Corinthians xii. 9: 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.' The amanuensis wrote this in the album. Then Milton *signed his name*.[132]

When he chose this quotation, Milton was almost if not totally blind. It was his way of acknowledging the fact. Five years later, on 26 September 1656, he was to dictate the same words for inscription in the album of another foreign visitor. They were pregnant with meaning for him. In 1654, after he had been blind for about three years, he thoughtfully composed this public statement: 'There is a way, and the Apostle is my authority, through weakness to the greatest strength. Let me be one of the weakest, provided only that in my weakness immortal and better vigour be put forth with greater effect; provided only that in my darkness the light of the Divine Countenance more brightly shines. For then I shall at once be the weakest and the mightiest—at once blind and of the most piercing sight. Thus, through my infirmity I may be consummated; thus, through this darkness I may be enrobed in light.' Here was the way of adjustment, and the hope, which he had discovered as early as November of 1651.[133]

More joy and sorrow could hardly be crowded into one year than Milton experienced in the year 1651. He was elated by the success of his *Defensio*. He had written a book 'of which all Europe talks from side to side'. When his great opportunity had come, he had been equal to it. But there was even further cause for happiness: visitors to his Whitehall apartment, whether they were familiar friends or lordly ambassadors, were doubtless shown a tiny baby, not yet old enough to recognize the name of John. Milton's son was born at 9.30 of the evening of 16 March.[134] The boy and the book had come into the world about a month apart. Looking at the infant in his crib, the father must have thanked God on two counts for postponing the fall of darkness. Yet darkness was very near. Milton's forehead and temples seemed to be the seat of chronic mists, which constantly oppressed and weighed down his eyes with a sort of sleepy heaviness, especially during the afternoon. When he stood still, objects seemed to float about to one side or the other. Lying in bed, he saw a flood of light flashing before his closed eyes; colours, proportionately less brilliant as his sight rapidly failed, seemed to burst from within, with a kind of rush and roar. He remembered the description given of Phineus in the *Argonautica*: 'And a dark stupor covered him, and it seemed that the earth reeled beneath his feet, and he lay in a strengthless trance, dumb.'[135]

As the painful months of 1651 dragged by, Milton waited for the expected *Responsio* of Salmasius. He heard the various rumours from the Continent, and held himself in tense readiness, trying hard to conserve his strength. When his opponent answered—and all reports promised an answer—he would deliver a *coup de grâce* with a *defensio secunda*. As for the anonymous *Eikon Aklastos*, which appeared in April against his *Eikonoklastes*, it represented a minor issue, and could be ignored for the present. It was an irritating book, easily refuted, but the great Milton–Salmasius controversy came first.

The Milton–Salmasius controversy was destined, we may observe, to attract a number of other writers, most of them antagonistic to Milton. They constituted, for the defender of the Republic, a most perplexing problem. He could not answer them all; he preferred to confine his attention to the major spokesman; yet attacks might gain force if unopposed. It was probably during the late summer of 1651 that the first of these appeared. It was a duodecimo of 222 pages entitled *Pro Rege et Populo Anglicano Apologia*, *contra Johannis Polypragmatici* (*alias Miltoni Angli*) *Defensionem Destructivam Regis et Populi Anglicani* ('apology for the king and people of England, against the Defence, destructive of king and people of England, by John the multifarious, alias Milton the Englishman'). The book was published at Antwerp, at the press of Jerome Verdussen, and its author, although anonymous, identified himself as a refugee clergyman. He was, in fact, John Rowland, an impoverished divine who had served as chaplain to a Royalist regiment during the wars, and was now living abroad so inconspicuously that no one suspected him of such activity.

Rumour pointed to two other men—Joseph Jane (author of the *Eikon Aklastos*) and Dr. Bramhall, ex-Bishop of Derry.[136]

Why such a pitiful literary foundling should have been fathered upon the learned John Bramhall is still a mystery. It was a hurried performance, in shaky Latin, full of adulation for Salmasius and reproach for Milton. Its twelve chapters consisted, in the main, of quotations from the English *Defensio* followed by tedious paragraphs of rebuttal. Its author complained that the great *Defensio Regia* of Salmasius had with difficulty been published in only one edition (he was not very well informed!), whereas the lies and calumnies of Milton had been published in 'so many copies that I know not to which I should refer the reader'. Since Salmasius was far away, and the people were in grave danger of subversion, he had hastened to throw water on 'the sulphurous fire' of Milton's words 'to keep it down until Salmasius drowns it with his own full flood'.

Milton's friends, as they had done on earlier occasions and were to do again, advised him to ignore the attack of so foolish a babbler. In this instance the problem was solved with a compromise. His nephew, John Phillips, now about twenty but still living with him (or nearby), volunteered to answer the anonymous *Apologia*. What could be more appropriate? Milton welcomed the offer, and promised to help with the composition. Why was it not the elder Phillips, Edward, who thus stepped forward? Edward had not remained long at Oxford University. In the summer of 1650, when his grandmother, Mrs. Katherine Phillips, had died at the age of eighty-one, he had suddenly found himself the owner of lucrative properties in Shrewsbury. He had been admitted (or readmitted) to Magdalen Hall, Oxford, on 10 November, but by the following summer, when he attained his majority, he was a citizen of Shrewsbury, attending to his inheritance. He lived in Shropshire for at least four years, 1651–5, visiting London occasionally. Eventually, he was to sell some or all of his Shrewsbury property, and return to London to become, with his brother John, a hack writer for the bookseller Nathaniel Brook. But this is to anticipate.[137]

From about September 1651 onwards, therefore, young John Phillips brought batches of manuscript to his uncle 'for his examination and polishment'. Edward Phillips, who includes this book in his catalogue of his uncle's works, tells us that it received 'such exact emendations before it went to the press that it might very well have passed for his'.[138] When it was published, however, on or slightly before 24 December 1651,[139] it was entitled *Joannis Philippi Angli Responsio Ad Apologiam Anonymi cujusdam tenebrionis pro Rege & Populo Anglicano infantissimam* ('the response of John Phillips, Englishman, to the very childish apology of some anonymous sneak' &c.). The printer was William Dugard, and the title page bore the date of the new year about to begin, 1652.[140]

The interest aroused abroad by Milton's sensational *Defensio* extended to some curiosity about lesser books that joined the controversy. In 1652, for example, Rowland's stupid *Apologia* enjoyed two reprintings, and Phillips's *Responsio* three. To meet the continuing demand, the *Defensio* itself, as we have seen, was twice reprinted on the Continent in 1652. Actually, the *Responsio* contributed little to the essential argument, being for the most part a succession of sardonic comments on the ignorance, ineptitude, and bad Latin exhibited by the *Apologia*. Assuming that Bramhall was the author, Phillips gave a contemptuous sketch of his life, and administered castigation throughout the 258 octavo pages of reply. Milton's book he asserted to be 'much approved by the judgement of all learned men both at home and abroad'. An answer from Salmasius had been expected, but the mountains of rumour have thus far produced only this squeaking mouse. Salmasius is known to be beside himself with fury, and out of favour with Queen Christina, because of Milton's confutation. Since the mouse is beneath the notice of so fine and forceful a writer as Milton, Phillips, a tyro in need of exercising his style, will cheerfully take on the business of rebuttal. He is 'bound by many ties of duty to the man, always to be venerated by me, who is the object of this attack'.[141]

For a young man of twenty the *Responsio* was an ambitious undertaking, and as an example of vigorous sarcasm (even allowing for expert assistance) it was a not unimpressive performance. Phillips had taken a most effective course to bring himself to the attention of governmental authorities, and he later seems to have been rewarded with some semi-official duties.[142] The Council of State was, of course, very pleased with its Secretary for Foreign Languages. He had been reappointed on 19 February 1651, and on 18 June the Council had taken formal notice of his various services to the Republic. As they had done in other instances, they had first voted him a financial reward; but then, either on Milton's proud refusal or someone's reminder that Milton had damned Salmasius most memorably for accepting money, they had expressed their thanks in other terms:

> The Council, taking notice of the many good services performed by Mr. John Milton, their Secretary for Foreign Languages, to this State and Commonwealth, particularly of his book in vindication of the Parliament and people of England against the calumnies and invectives of Salmasius, have thought fit to declare their resentment [i.e., grateful appreciation] and good acceptance of the same, and that the thanks of the Council be returned to Mr. Milton, and their sense represented in that behalf.[143]

Life was not only joyous and sad in 1651; it was grotesquely ironical. Other officials of the government were being rewarded handsomely for far less important contributions, but Milton had written himself out of an honorarium! Worse, as early as April, the Parliament he had served so well began a campaign (or so it might seem) to oust him from his Whitehall apartment. It was really the work of a committee of the House, appointed to supervise the allocation of rooms in the highly desirable government buildings. Their first order to eject Milton came a few weeks after the birth of his son, and it was stayed only by action of the Council, which, on 10 April, sent two of its number, Sir Henry Mildmay and Sir Gilbert Pickering, to intercede on Milton's behalf. On 9 May Parliament passed a ruling which facilitated the accommodation of its own members in Whitehall, the Mews, and Somerset House, and ordered its committee 'to put forth such other persons and families as they shall think fit'. For a month Milton was left in peace, but then the harassed committee, yielding to pressure from its own colleagues, issued a 'positive order' for Milton's 'speedy remove out of his lodgings'. On 11 June the Council, rising again to its secretary's defence, appointed a committee of four to meet with the Parliament's committee, 'and to endeavour with them that the said Mr. Milton may be continued where he is, in regard of the employment which he is in to this Council, which necessitates him to reside near the Council'. This move was evidently successful, for Milton remained in his apartment—for a time. On 1 December a new Council convened, only twenty-one of the previous forty members having been reappointed. It is likely that this fact, and a feeling that his total blindness would in any case prevent his own reappointment, caused Milton to abandon his Whitehall lodgings. His need for a more nearly permanent residence at such a time is obvious, but it is also possible that Parliament's committee on allocations finally had its ruthless way. Whatever the whole truth, Wednesday, 17 December, found Milton and his family moving out of Whitehall.[144] He had been without official employment for more than two weeks. But twelve days later, after the new Council had been meeting for almost a month, Milton was again chosen Secretary for Foreign Languages.[145]

The reappointment, although painfully delayed, was a fine gesture of gratitude and of confidence. It is the more pleasant to be able to record it because, in sober fact, Milton's usefulness to the Council during 1651 (apart from the *Defensio* written earlier) had been very slight. He was a sick man in the months that brought his greatest triumph. As he suffered the rapid approach and then the arrival of total blindness, his health continued wretched. Probably, even to the last, he had dosed himself with medicines, and let his physicians take great quantities of blood, in an effort to delay the inevitable. There is no reason to suspect that he was victimized by quacks (on 4 February 1652 Whitelocke noted 'one who undertook to cure the blind and deaf, took money beforehand of divers people, and then ran away'), but standard cures in 1651 for diseases of the eye were all, by modern lights, barbaric.[146]

As early as 19 February 1651 the Council had made it clear that his presence at their meetings was no longer expected except upon special request.[147] Presumably he attended committee sessions with the Portuguese minister until 16 May, when Parliament broke off the negotiations for a treaty and Milton was ordered to expedite arrangements for the departure of Guimaraes and his retinue.[148] There are also reasons for believing that the Council used him occasionally in its transactions with the Spanish ambassador; on 27 March and 26 June, for example, he was asked to send or carry certain letters to Cardenas.[149] On the whole, however, Milton seems to have been spared a good deal of routine work. There is no mention of him in the Council's order books from 27 June to 26 October of this year.

One responsibility, largely routine, was the licensing of *Mercurius Politicus*, the semi-official weekly which had begun on 13 June 1650, under the editorship of Marchamont Needham. Milton's supervision of this journal dated from the thirty-third number (23 January 1651), and lasted through the eighty-fifth (22 January 1652), a period in which the journal printed twelve references to Salmasius or the reception of the English *Defensio* (all that ever appeared).[150] Knowing the views on censorship expressed in *Areopagitica* and his satisfaction that Bradshaw's Press Act had technically abandoned licensing of books, we may be confident that Milton's activities as licenser of a newsletter were altogether perfunctory. He and Needham became excellent friends. A real convert to republican theory, Needham had aroused Milton's interest before this particular relationship began. The journalist had for some years been notorious as editor of the witty, Royalist *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, and when he had been arrested in June 1649, Milton had been asked to examine his various papers and report to the Council. Despite the fact that Needham subsequently escaped from Newgate prison and was rearrested, the Council finally, on 14 November, ordered his release. Milton's report must have been favourable; indeed, their later association suggests that Milton played an important role in turning Needham's versatile pen to republican uses. On or before 8 May 1650 the ex-Royalist published a long pamphlet entitled *The Case of the Commonwealth of England Stated*; and on 24 May the Council recognized his service by a gift of £50, and by a probationary pension of £100 a year for further journalistic assistance. Three weeks later he started the *Mercurius Politicus*, reprinting as leading articles in a number of issues (Numbers 16–69) sections of the pamphlet already published and approved. Nevertheless, licensing of the sheet was required under the Press Act of 20 September 1649, and it was the Council's privilege to name the licenser. Even a scrupulous person, who heartily believed in censorship, would have found his duties light in these circumstances; and Milton, we may be sure, wasted few hours as an editorial supervisor of his friend. One notices the fact that his duties ceased soon after his blindness became total, but it is quite likely that he was ordered to stop—and for an entirely different reason.[151]

Only once, so far as we know, did Milton's unorthodox views on censorship lead him to open conflict with established authority in the period of his life as a government official. The details of the matter elude us, but the outlines are clear enough. On 27 January 1652—five days after the last registration of *Mercurius Politicus* as licensed by Milton—the Council of State ordered the seizure of all copies of a certain book, and the immediate apprehension of its printer. The printer was William Dugard, publisher of Milton's official *Defensio* and John Phillips's recent *Responsio*, and the book was the infamous Racovian Catechism, a Socinian manifesto which denied the Trinity and contained other heretical opinions.[152] Examined by the Council, Dugard pleaded, it appears, that the book had been in effect licensed by Milton. Called to testify, Milton declared that he had done no more than follow his deepest convictions, and reminded the Council of his *Areopagitica*.[153] We do not know what the Council replied, but it is certain that the affair did not end in a debate between the secretary and his employers, or with his immediate withdrawal as an official licenser. On 10 February the whole matter was before Parliament, in a petition brought by John Owen and other Independent ministers.[154] Parliament appointed a committee of forty to consider the case. On 2 April this committee reported, having meanwhile examined both Milton and Dugard. Among the documents formally submitted was a note 'under the hand of Mr. John Milton, of the 10th of August, 1650'—the contents of which were not described.[155] Parliament was horrified by the whole business, condemned the Racovian Catechism as 'blasphemous, erroneous, and scandalous', and ordered copies of it to be publicly burned in London and Westminster. What was done about the man who had allowed such a book to be published does not appear. By 2 April 1652 Milton was the internationally known defender of the English Republic, a figure much admired by foreigners. Parliament, we may well believe, neglected to punish so embarrassing an offender, letting him off with a private reprimand. He did no more licensing. It seems likely, however, that a number of England's legislators were now acquainted with the arguments of *Areopagitica*.

Returning to 1651, we may notice further that little translation was asked of Milton in his illness. He prepared one letter to the Spanish ambassador (30 May),[156] and one to his royal master (14 July).[157] There were also a short note to the Senate of Danzig (6 February),[158] and a letter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, this last prepared, it appears, on 22 May, but not officially ordered and dispatched until the following January.[159] It is probable that Milton, remembering his own pleasant sojourn in Florence, embellished his specific instructions in the letter to the Grand Duke, which gracefully mentions Tuscan kindness to young Englishmen studying abroad. In any case, these four are the only state letters which date from 1651 and can confidently be attributed to Milton.[160] In addition, on 28 March he was asked to translate into English a fifteenth-century treaty between England and the Low Countries, for the use of Walter

Strickland and Oliver St. John, then recently arrived at The Hague as joint ambassadors-extraordinary to the United Provinces.[161] A new treaty was in prospect, and the old *Intercursus Magnus* was useful as a basis for negotiations.

It will be observed that English diplomacy had finally begun to flourish—that foreign states were expressing a desire for amicable relations—even before Milton's *Defensio* aroused the interest of Europe. The book's contribution to the respect which the Commonwealth soon commanded is very difficult to evaluate, for Cromwell's victories in the field were both the overture and the loud, martial accompaniment of Milton's proud words. In June 1650, when the news of Ascham's murder in Madrid had been followed by news of the arrival in Scotland of Charles II, Royalist hopes had been high. But September brought word of Cromwell's great defeat of the Scots at Dunbar, and the Continent was obviously impressed. In November an unexpected event strengthened the influence of the Republic in Holland: William II, Prince of Orange, died at The Hague, and the party which had been favourable toward the English regicides suddenly assumed power. As the year drew to a close, Admiral Blake at last caught up with Prince Rupert's fleet off Malaga, and won an overwhelming victory. Despite these setbacks, Royalist hopes were briefly revived during the first seven months of 1651, while Milton's *Defensio* was alone in taking the offensive. Cromwell was then ill, and the Scottish campaign was almost stalemated. August saw Charles II and his army of Scots, in a bold manœuvre, undertake the invasion of England. By forced marches, Cromwell caught up with the King at Worcester, where, on 2 September (the anniversary of the battle of Dunbar), he wrought utter disaster upon the enemy. Charles escaped death, wandered for some weeks in disguise, and finally fled to Normandy. Meanwhile, left behind in Scotland by Cromwell, Lieutenant-General Monk had taken the offensive too, capturing Stirling Castle on 14 August and Dundee on 1 September. But Worcester was the crowning triumph of the year, and a rejoicing people determined to celebrate its anniversary for ever. The echo of its five ringing hours was heard clearly on the Continent, and the permanence of the new Republic seemed now beyond question. In October arrangements were begun for the combining of England and Scotland into one Commonwealth.

While nations shake to great events, and history unfolds palpably, the individual citizen continues to worry about his family and private finances. Milton, for example, had a number of minor, and one major, financial worries during the period we are discussing. (I shall say nothing here about his brother Christopher, who by 1652 was a resident of Ipswich, and for some reason had failed to pay the full sequestration fine imposed in 1646.)[162] Like other citizens, Milton complained of the oppressive taxes, and of property withheld during the civil commotions;[163] like others, while receiving interest on loans made to some individuals (like Rodolph Warcupp), he was failing to receive it on a loan made as long ago as 1638 to the Cope family, despite his putting the bond into action at common law.[164] There is also some reason to believe that he had lent money to the Government ('upon the Public Faith') which he was unable to get back.[165] Prudently he had decided to put his official salary into excise bonds, and on 13 May 1651 he purchased one for £400 from a George Foxcroft; it paid eight per cent. interest.[166] During 1649–51 he was also making, but sometimes failing to make, payments on a renewal of his lease on a house in Bread Street known as the Rose, from which, no doubt, he was meanwhile receiving some income in rents.[167]

The major worry came in 1650 when a new ordinance not only compelled him to pay a heavy fine on the Powell's Wheatley property, but, incidentally, put a severe strain on his relations with his mother-in-law. He had obtained possession of this property, it will be recalled, on 20 November 1647 as a legal means of obtaining payment of the debt owed him by his wife's father. During the following winter he had received only a small rent from the cottages, but on 25 March 1648 he had arranged satisfactory rentals and had since received a reasonable income.[168] He had regularly paid Mrs. Powell her widow's thirds. On 1 August 1650, however, while he was preoccupied with the *Defensio*, Parliament passed a law designed to end a very common means of defrauding the Government—the conveyance, by defeated Royalists, of part or all of their property into friendly, republican hands in order to avoid seizure or penalties. The law now compelled payment of the appropriate fine by any person who had acquired the estate of a Royalist delinquent since 20 May 1642. Milton, therefore, about the middle of August 1650, submitted the usual petition to compound;[169] but so absorbing was his work in answering Salmasius, he neglected to complete the business. Consequently, an order was finally issued forbidding his tenants to pay him any rent. The *Defensio* completed, on 25 February 1651 he entered a second petition, delivered it to the Committee on Compounding, swore to it, and obtained action on it—all on the same day. Three days later he submitted the necessary details regarding the debt and the income thus far received (£180).[170] On 4 March the fine was fixed at £130.[171] Milton paid it, in two instalments, on 11 and 24 March, and paid, too, the charges of £2. 1*s.* 6*d.* On 27 March (eleven days after the birth of young John), the property was officially cleared.[172] But Milton was in new trouble, for the law now forbade his allowing Mary's mother her thirds.

Mrs. Powell seems to have blamed Milton exclusively for this unexpected termination of income. On 16 April she formally petitioned the Commissioners for Compounding to enforce her rights. Three days later they dismissed her claim, ordering 'that the petitioner be left to the law for recovery of her thirds'.[173] It was no concern of theirs, for it was obvious that she had established no legal claim upon the money collected by Milton toward the payment of her husband's debt. Nevertheless, on 11 July she petitioned again:

> That the petitioner brought £3,000 [actually £2,000] portion to her late husband, and is now left in a most sad condition, the estate left being but £80 per annum, the thirds whereof is but £26 13*s.* 4*d.*, to maintain herself and eight children [only four of whom were under twenty years of age]. The said estate being extended by John Milton on a statute staple for a debt of £300 [actually £500] for which he hath compounded with your honours on the Act of the first of August, and therein allowance given him for the petitioner's thirds [a false statement], yet the said Mr. Milton expects your further order therein before he will pay the same. She therefore humbly prayeth your honours' order and direction to the said Mr. Milton for the payment of her said thirds, and the arrears thereof, to preserve her and her children from starving.

Such an exaggerated statement of the case must have been acutely embarrassing to Milton as a government official. He moved to intercede, and on the flyleaf of her petition someone added his words: 'Although I have compounded for my extent, and shall be so much the longer in receiving my debt, yet at the request of Mrs. Powell in regard of her present necessities I am contented, so far as belongs to my consent, to allow her the thirds of what I receive from the estate, if the Commissioners shall so order it that what I allow her may not be reckoned upon my accompt.' Further than this he could hardly go in his concern for the welfare of the Powells. But his mother-in-law, sure that she was being mistreated, could go further; and she, too, added comments which were noted on the petition: 'By the law she might recover her thirds without doubt, but she is so extreme poor she hath not wherewithal to prosecute, and besides, Mr. Milton is a harsh and choleric man, and married Mrs. Powell's daughter, who would be undone if any such course were taken against him by Mrs. Powell, he having turned away his wife heretofore for a long space upon some other occasion.' The Commissioners settled the matter tersely on 16 July: 'The estate is wholly extended, and a saving as to the thirds prayed but not granted; we cannot, therefore, allow the thirds to the petitioner.' They were unimpressed, it seems, by both malice and pathos.[174]

Despite Mrs. Powell's fondness for inaccuracy, and her effort to defame the newly famous defender of the Republic, it is not difficult to understand her extreme irritation. Milton was to her, of course, a special symbol of the forces that had deprived her of her home and all life's comforts; but the government which he served so proudly had piled injustice upon injury in her case, denying her even the legal rights of a delinquent. Her husband, it will be recalled, had been comprised within the Oxford Articles of Surrender (20 June 1646), which had granted, not only the peaceable possession of all property for a period of six months, but also the privilege of regaining permanent possession by payment of a composition fine. Furthermore, he had complied with the law by promptly submitting a petition to the London Commissioners for Compounding. But the personal estate which he had valued at £500 in his inventory had been seized by the Oxford sequestrators and sold to one Matthew Appletree of London for £335; and the timber which he had valued at £400 had been seized by the Parliament itself, and bestowed upon the town of Banbury for repairs. Since the Powells had already lost (they claimed) at least £3,000 because of the war, these further losses were overwhelming; and the composition fine, set at £180, could not be paid. After Powell's death his family found themselves destitute.

In 1649 Mrs. Powell began a long and discouraging campaign to obtain justice. On or before 16 November she formally protested the violation of the Oxford Surrender Articles, in a petition addressed to the Commissioners for Relief upon Articles of War. The wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly. Records had to be checked with the Commissioners for Compounding with Delinquents, who reported on 14 December.[175] Then months passed. On 18 April 1650 the Powell estate was ordered to be resequestered because the composition fine was unpaid.[176] Finally, on 12 June 1650, the Court of Articles acted favourably upon Mrs. Powell's petition, making the Oxford sequestrators answerable to her for the goods sold in violation of the Surrender Articles. But nothing happened. She had a court order, but she was unable to effect its execution.[177] In August, when Milton first petitioned to compound for the Wheatley property (and then forgot the matter), Mrs. Powell petitioned regarding the same property—as also, five days later, did Mrs. Elizabeth Ashworth and Sir Edward Powell, who held mortgages on part of it.[178] On 27 November the Court of Articles again issued an order on Mrs. Powell's behalf; and again nothing happened.[179] The powers of the Court lapsed on 20 December and it looked as though justice had been utterly frustrated. The widow's bitterness probably reached a new depth on 19 April 1651, when she was sued by John Pye, who complained in court that she sought to prevent his peaceable enjoyment of the Forest Hill estate.[180] This was the same day, be it noted, on which her first demand that Milton pay her the thirds of the income from the Wheatley property had been denied. If she felt herself particularly abused, who can blame her?

And who can blame Milton if he bitterly resented the intrusion of family affairs at such a time, when fame and physical suffering were at their several heights? He could hardly have relished either Mrs. Powell's melodramatic petitions or her ill-tempered, slanderous asides. The official records state nothing, of course, about private arrangements. He may, or he may not, have helped support his mother-in-law from his personal funds. We do not know. There was nothing to prevent his giving her outright one-third of the income from the Wheatley property, and he may have done so after he realized that, despite her claim and his own assumption since 1647, she had no legal right to the money. But her petitions suggested no such solution. Without going to Chancery she wanted the Commissioners for Compounding to acknowledge, not only Milton's right to hold Wheatley until his debt was fully satisfied, but also her own right to collect simultaneously one-third of the annual income from the property. The Commissioners declared, in effect, that such matters were out of their province, and advised her to go to court. Milton did all that he could to help; indeed, through ignorance of the true legal status of her claim he had already broken the law, besides delaying collection of the money owing him. He could now do nothing more, unless privately. There is no reason to believe that Mrs. Powell and her children starved. In 1651 she had four sons aged between twenty and thirty.

Milton and his own family spent Christmas of 1651 in entirely new surroundings. The sudden change of residence must have occasioned a great deal of discomfort. Mary was expecting another baby in about four months. Little John was only nine months old. Milton himself was ill, and utterly unable to appreciate the pleasant view from the new house. It was a pretty house, on the street in Westminster known as Petty France. There was a garden in the rear (Milton had doubtless missed this usual feature of the places in which he lived), and a gate in the garden opened into the cheerful expanse of St. James's Park. The neighbourhood was quite reputable; next door lived Lord Scudamore, who had been so courteous to Milton long ago, in 1638, when the young man had visited Paris and Scudamore had been ambassador there. Times had changed, and the nobleman, having been imprisoned during part of the civil war, was now living in studious retirement.[181]

* * *

The move to Petty France occurred in the midst of Milton's protracted negotiations with a foreign diplomat, whose diary (*Tagebuch*) of his various dealings with the Republic, fortunately preserved, affords us a detailed sample of the activities of the Secretary for Foreign Languages. From one point of view, this diary shows us Milton as a minor figure in a new and numerous bureaucracy, with all the familiar elements of red tape, referring to committee, wrangling over details, and delays piled on exasperating delays, as various individuals, mutually distrustful, jockeyed for influence and power. In the Government of 1651 the usual bureaucratic confusion was aggravated by inexperience, for (as Milton ruefully observed) many of England's new masters were not only untravelled but also innocent of international affairs. Perhaps because of his own happy experience in Italy, perhaps because of his broad culture and urbanity, Milton's sympathies sometimes tended to be, not with his superiors, but rather with the bright, uninhibited, highly educated foreigners who came on diplomatic missions. Quite literally as well as figuratively, he spoke their language, and he felt closer to them than he did to the prosperous merchants or successful soldiers who were among his bosses. From another point of view, then, the diary I am about to draw upon shows us Milton engaging in his own kind of personal diplomacy. There is no question of basic disloyalty, though he was criticized by some Council members, we know, for being friendly with a foreigner.[182] Offers of friendship, Milton seemed to recognize instinctively, are the very basis of international understanding, and in his own way, on a level of scholarship and sophistication, he set about making friends for England.

Hermann Mylius, an envoy from Anthony Gunther, Count of Oldenburg, arrived in England before August 1651.[183] It was not until 15 October, however, that his credentials were attended to by Parliament and his business referred to the Council of State.[184] Milton, who had been away from London for a while (probably to Wheatley, to collect his rents), was now returned,[185] and on 16 October the German envoy wrote him a note requesting a brief interview. Milton promptly sent word that he was meeting that day with the Council, but would try to call upon Mylius around evening.[186] He did not come, and the following day Mylius sent him another polite note. Milton replied by parliamentary messenger, again excusing himself (and again not writing), but promised to call on 20 or 21 October with Sir Oliver Fleming, the Parliament's veteran master of ceremonies.[187] On 20 October, before nine in the morning, Sir Oliver came, but without Milton. He politely rebuked the enterprising foreigner for trying to communicate with Milton (and with several Members of Parliament); the law forbade English public servants to make or receive visits during diplomatic negotiations. Fleming (who himself had brought along a member of the Council, perhaps as a witness) went on to explain other regulations and matters of protocol. He carefully examined a copy of Mylius's proposal, and advised him on how to present it to the committee of the Council, which would give audience to the visitor within half an hour.

In his diary Mylius describes the journey to Whitehall in two carriages, the soldiers standing smartly at attention, the long walk (a little procession) through various halls and galleries, the short wait alone in an antechamber 'hung with splendid wallpaper', and another procession through several rooms hung with tapestries to the audience chamber itself. On one side of a long table, facing him, sat the committee members ('the Lord Commissioners', Mylius called them). In the centre sat Whitelocke, Keeper of the Great Seal, and at his right, standing, was Milton. After ceremonies of introduction, Mylius was invited to sit in the single chair facing Whitelocke, and Fleming stood at his left, facing Milton. Speaking Latin, Mylius explained his mission at great length, Milton listening attentively and occasionally making notes. After the committee members had conferred briefly, Whitelocke responded in English, which Milton then had to translate into Latin. They promised that the full Council of State and the Parliament would give due consideration to the visitor's requests. There was further ceremony, after which Fleming accompanied Mylius back to his lodgings. Fleming agreed that Milton could now usefully be brought into the business, and promised to talk with him about it.[188] Pleased with his success after so much delay, that night Mylius wrote Milton's predecessor, the German-born Georg Weckherlin, a long letter, bubbling with quotations and literary allusions. He had at last met 'the great Milton', he said. He apologized for not having answered two of Weckherlin's letters, the last of which had carefully explained to him the regulation forbidding meetings with visiting diplomats.[189]

The Count of Oldenburg, having remained at peace during the past thirty years, while Germany had been afflicted with many wars, wished from the new English government what he had received from other nations—a formal safeguard, guaranteeing himself, his subjects, and his successors the right to travel over sea or land without molestation. Mylius, a doctor of civil law and a councillor of the German prince, had been sent to obtain such a safeguard. Because the request was unusual, and because both Milton and his superiors were absorbed in other matters, the business proceeded slowly. Milton, we know, was at this point helping John Phillips in the composition of the *Responsio*.

The audience had taken place on a Monday. On Thursday the Council of State asked the committee to report on Saturday. Word of this undoubtedly reached the alert German diplomat, though perhaps not Milton; early on Saturday, 25 October, Mylius wrote him an effusive, flattering letter, and Milton replied by parliamentary messenger that he would visit him about three o'clock that afternoon.[190] But after noon Milton was summoned to the Council meeting, and sent another message to apologize for breaking the appointment. Probably not surprised, Mylius wrote a letter expressing his disappointment, enclosing additional material on the safeguard, and renewing his invitation. (The Council that day instructed Whitelocke to report to the House on the Oldenburg business.) Milton sent word that he would surely come on Monday.[191] On Monday, however, the Council gave Milton some new business: he was asked to investigate the desirability of bringing out a revised edition of a book by a Mr. White.[192] On Friday, 31 October, Mylius noted ruefully in his diary that 'Mr. Milton, Secretary of State', had three times stated his intention of calling, but had never come. Mylius went that day to Sir Oliver Fleming (who several days earlier had been taken with a 'sudden illness'), and was told, very confidentially, what action the Council had taken. Fleming asked for copies of the materials sent to Milton.[193] On 4 November John Dury, visiting Mylius, said that he had talked with Milton about the safeguard, and that satisfactory action could be expected soon.[194] Persistently but politely Mylius sent Milton another note on 6 November, reminding him that his business had now taken three months, and begging permission to view the final draft of the safeguard before it was submitted to Parliament.[195] Milton sent word at once, pleading pressure of business, but promising a conference that day or the next.

On the next day, for the first time, he sent Mylius a letter instead of an oral message. He apologized for the delays and for his own failure to arrange a face-to-face encounter; he had been extremely busy, and also had been 'ill'. He returned the drafts of a safeguard that Mylius had sent him on 25 October, commenting, noncommittally, that the points at issue would receive attention.[196] (Evidently they did; on this same day, 7 November, the Oldenburg business was again placed on the Council's agenda, and the next day Whitelocke was asked to speed his reporting to Parliament.)[197] Mylius wrote an extravagant note of thanks for Milton's letter, and sent back the drafts, which he wanted Milton to keep for future reference, if necessary.[198] Progress in the affair now depended upon Whitelocke, who, however, had turned up evidence that the Count of Oldenburg was also negotiating with Scottish Royalists. This unexpected development Milton confided to John Dury, who on 18 November ('in really wretched weather, so as to be doubly secret and unrecognized') went to Mylius with the disturbing tale.[199] Three days later, Milton sent to Whitelocke the documents necessary for his report to Parliament, and on 24 November informed Mylius by messenger that action was at last due. Headache and sore eyes ('augenwehe') prevented his coming to call; moreover, Mylius 'knew the main reason'.[200] At last, on 26 November, Whitelocke, for the Council of State, reported the Oldenburg business to Parliament. Parliament promptly referred it back to the Council, and the Council, the same day, referred it back to the committee.[201]

In all this time Mylius had seen Milton only once. On 1 December he noted in his diary some information he had recently gleaned about the secretariat of the Council: Gualter Frost was the leading one; his three sons, also on the staff, were influential; Milton 'was almost blind [*fast blind*], so that the others had all the business given to them'.[202] This was discouraging. He did not write Milton again until 17 December, when he dashed off a brief note effusively begging speedier progress from his champion.[203] Undoubtedly he did not realize that the blind man was then in the very process of moving from Whitehall to Petty France. Nor did he realize that, since 1 December, when his last appointment had lapsed, Milton was without any official status in the Government. On his forty-third birthday, 9 December, the poet probably felt himself finished as a public servant, if not as a useful citizen. On 18 December he met the elder Frost accidentally, and learned from him that the matter of the safeguard was at a standstill, but he did not at once answer Mylius's letter.

On 29 December 1651 Milton was reappointed Secretary for Foreign

Languages.[204] Was the agonizing delay due to his bad health and obviously decreased effectiveness, or did his efforts to help Mylius, in the face of Whitelocke's hostility, make members of the Council hesitate or voice objections?[205] We shall probably never know. On 31 December, however, he answered the letter received amidst the confusion of changing residence, this time addressing Mylius by his first name. He explained, of course, some of the reasons for his apparent negligence—the move, his 'illness' ('now almost a perpetual enemy'), his frequent absence from Council meetings because of his invalid state, and the embarrassing lack of anything pleasant to report. Today, however, he had attended Council and had twice reminded Whitelocke of Mylius, with the result that tomorrow was appointed for consideration of the affair.[206] Mylius answered the next day. He had heard of Milton's sore eyes and frequent headaches, and was deeply grieved. He appreciated the Secretary's efforts on his behalf and still hoped to thank him face to face.[207] On the afternoon of 2 January Mylius had another audience with a committee of the Council,[208] and on Saturday, 3 January, called to pay his respects to Milton. He recorded some of their conversation in his diary, noting, finally, that Milton presented him with a copy of John Phillips's *Responsio* and asked his judgement on the work.[209]

Mylius was a conscientious deputy of his prince. He was determined to see the draft of the safeguard just before it was submitted to Parliament, in order to make certain that it conformed in every detail to his master's wishes. The committee having agreed on the form of the document at a late evening meeting on 6 January, Mylius called upon Milton the next day and re-emphasized his desire. Although professedly busy with a letter of state to Tuscany, the Secretary promised to see what could be done.[210] By pre-arrangement, early the next morning Mylius sent his amanuensis for the papers. Milton sent them with a covering note; he had added a few things, he said, and had condensed others, but he had phrased most of the document in Mylius's own words. If the envoy returned the draft before two o'clock, it could be shown to the Council later in the day.[211] Mylius returned the draft promptly. As he had suspected, it contained things not to his master's liking, and some important matters were omitted. Carefully, therefore, he noted suggestions for revision, and returned the papers with a tactful note of thanks.[212] Still anxious—and still before two o'clock—he went himself to Milton's house, to make sure that nothing got overlooked. He watched while Milton made a few notes in the margin, half-promising to remember other matters. Unsatisfied, Mylius persuaded the reluctant Secretary to have his amanuensis not only make a new copy of the whole document, but also go along with Milton to the Council meeting, so that the safeguard could be presented in completely acceptable shape.[213]

The proposal was now ready, but the Council was not. In the early afternoon of the next day, 9 January, Milton called on Mylius to explain that it had been impossible to bring up the Oldenburg business because of the pressure of other affairs, but that he would try again. He brought along a new copy of the document, and obligingly left it with Mylius to peruse while he took care of some business in the city (probably the collection of interest due on an excise bond, a task postponed since 13 November), saying that he would fetch it on his return. Mylius found it totally satisfactory, of course (much of the wording was now his own).[214] Thereafter he saw more of Milton. The Secretary had lent him a copy of the anonymous *Apologia* to which John Phillips had replied, and on 13 January or thereabouts he returned the book with a careful note expressing his contempt for anyone who could hate 'the triumphs of Miltiades and Milton'. 'The ill-omened tribe of screech-owls cannot mar the brightness of the sun.' Incidentally, he hoped that the safeguard had survived the criticism of both the Council and Parliament. If so, could Milton rescue it from the hand of the transcriber of documents, and let him see what had been done to it? He promised to return it promptly.[215]

To this request Milton did not reply, for the Oldenburg business had not progressed so far as Mylius had imagined. When he wrote again, on 20 January, there was bad news to report: the safeguard had hit another snag. On the preceding day Milton had taken the document, as usual, to a meeting of the Council, but it had been objected (by Walter Strickland and others, it seems) that the Count of Oldenburg was plotting against the people of Bremen, with whom the English maintained very friendly relations. The matter of the safeguard had been referred, therefore, to a committee, with instructions to investigate further and report. In telling Mylius of these latest developments, Milton advised the German envoy to get in touch at once with Thomas Chaloner and Henry Neville, who were not only members of the committee but also favourable to Oldenburg. If they were properly armed with the truth, the whole business could be finished within two days.[216] Greatly upset, Mylius went at once to call upon Milton, but learned little more in private conversation. As he left, one of the Dutch arrived for an interview—surely a bad omen! But he wasted no time in following the shrewd counsel he had been given, and after writing Chaloner and Neville, the next morning he wrote to Milton, explaining the Bremen rumour, chafing at the delay and the Council's concern with idle talk, and begging the continued aid of the Secretary.

But Milton and the Council were now engrossed in other matters, and Mylius noted the new cause of delay in an entry in his diary on 28 January.[217] It was the Dutch business. On 20 December Parliament had formally received the three ambassadors—Jacob Catz, Gerard Schaep, and Paul van de Perre—sent by the High and Mighty Lords the States General of the United Provinces to remonstrate against a recent Navigation

Act and to resume the treaty-making broken off at The Hague in June 1651, when the English ambassadors, Walter Strickland and Oliver St. John, had failed to reach an agreement with the Dutch. Parliament had referred the negotiations, of course, to the Council of State; and on 19 January the first paper had been received by the Council.[218] Milton's services were at once in demand for translation of the documents being interchanged. Presumably he translated the paper of 19 January; there was an official order for him to translate into English the next which arrived, on 23 January.[219] There were also orders for him to put into Latin the Council's replies to these two papers, 26 and 28 January.[220] On 27 January the Council gave him a different cause for concern by seizing all copies of the notorious Racovian Catechism.[221] On 30 January there was a letter to the Spanish ambassador to be translated.[222]

On 4 February the Council got back to the Oldenburg business. The next day it approved the draft of a letter of state to Mylius's master, and ordered it to be translated into Latin so that Whitelocke could submit it to Parliament for approval.[223] Thanks to Fleming and Milton, Mylius kept close track of these developments, and fretted because Milton was not sent the documents promptly.[224] Checking again on 6 February (the day of Ireton's burial in Westminster Abbey), he learned that Milton had received only an English version of a rescript to ambassadors, but had sent his amanuensis for the other papers.[225] On the morning of 9 February Milton told him that the safeguard was to be discussed once more that afternoon by the Council, which might not grant it, a rescript to ambassadors and ministers being held sufficient. Mylius was outraged; the safeguard was the very crux of his mission, and he begged Milton to intercede personally with the Council. Milton promised to try, but observed, bitterly, that of the forty members of the Council—chiefly merchants and soldiers—only three or four had ever been outside England; Mylius must realize that he was dealing with people who were quite ignorant of international affairs. He must not blame the Commonwealth, or the saner ones in government who, unfortunately, were in the minority. These outspoken views Mylius carefully recorded in his diary.[226]

Milton tried, and failed, to get the full Council to discuss the safeguard. He did, however, talk with individual members of the pertinent committee and, as he had suspected, found them ignorant of the facts. They had not paid enough attention, and actually believed that they were giving Oldenburg all it wanted. On 10 February Milton wrote Mylius to say that he had done everything in his power and that Mylius had now better write directly to the Council, making clear the grounds of his dissatisfaction.[227] Characteristically, Mylius acted promptly on this advice, not neglecting to dash off a note of thanks to his benefactor before he dashed off to see Fleming;[228] and on the same day the Council referred the German agent's letter to its committee on foreign affairs, adding that

Strickland's information about Oldenburg should also be brought to the attention of the committee.[229] (This was the day that the Racovian Catechism scandal reached the floor of Parliament.) Milton's advice was evidently sound, for on 11 February (with its Latin Secretary absent) the Council finally approved the English version of the safeguard, slightly amended, and empowered Whitelocke and Henry Neville to approve Milton's Latin version and to submit the two documents to Parliament.[230]

The following day inclement weather again prevented Milton's attending the Council, and the order regarding the safeguard was sent to his house in Petty France. The documents arrived in the morning, followed by an inevitable visit from Mylius, who now discovered that a certain important clause had been dropped out of the safeguard.[231] He argued persuasively for its re-insertion, even if it meant further delay, and Milton that same day, sending both English and Latin versions to Whitelocke, in a covering letter explained the desired addition and urged its acceptance.[232] Meanwhile, the German envoy fretted over the situation; after seeing Milton he had talked with Fleming about his latest problem, and he sent Milton notes on both 12 and 13 February.[233] Milton replied on 13 February, suggesting that Mylius either send a messenger to Mr. Frost to learn the outcome of the matter, or wait until evening, when Milton himself would report. (This sympathetic letter was written by Edward Phillips from his uncle's dictation; he was evidently on a visit from Shrewsbury, and had offered to make himself helpful.[234])

Four days later, 17 February, Parliament approved the safeguard in Latin and English as submitted by Whitelocke, and also the English version of the covering letter to the Count of Oldenburg, which explained that while his deputy had been sedulous in solicitation, unusual affairs of state had caused tardiness in complying with his request.[235] This, however, was not the end of Milton's relations with Mylius. Parliament (or Whitelocke) had not allowed the envoy the additional wording he had begged for, but it was not until a full week later that he—or Milton—discovered the fact. Milton still had to translate the letter of credence into Latin. Both the safeguard and covering letter had to be officially prepared in sufficient copies, authenticated by Milton, and signed and sealed by the Speaker of Parliament. All this took more than a week to accomplish—while Mylius chafed and tried, usually in vain, to learn what, if anything, was happening.

Parliament had approved the safeguard as a first order of business on 17 February, but it was late that day before Mylius heard the news, brought him by a 'relative' (Edward Phillips?) of Milton.[236] The blind secretary had received the English version of the letter of credence, and the next day he produced the translation, which was read in the Council on 19 February. This much Mylius learned by calling on Fleming before six o'clock in the morning of the 20th, and he resolved to visit next both

Frost and Milton, to see if matters were being expedited.[237] Not finding Milton at home when he called, he sent a messenger on 21 February, asking if it would be possible for him to inspect the two basic documents.[238] Milton replied that he had not seen the safeguard since he had sent it to Whitelocke, that the letter of credence had been sent three days ago to be transcribed by the Council's copyists, but that he had been assured of the granting of all requests made by Mylius. Nothing remained except for Frost to send the documents to the Clerk of Parliament for signing. Indeed, this might already have been done; if not, Milton would see to it on 23 February, when he next attended the Council.[239] On 23 February Mylius penned an eloquent note of reminder (he was eager to see his wife again, he said), and Milton sent word that copies of both documents would be ready that day.[240] They were, but Parliament was now meeting in late sessions on urgent matters, and the signing and sealing had to be postponed. Moreover, Milton had finally learned that the desired additions to the safeguard had been refused. On 24 February he met Mylius in the Park and broke the news to him. Probably to his great relief, the young diplomat accepted the rebuff philosophically. All he wanted now was an end to the business, and he begged Milton to speed the process somehow. Milton explained that as soon as the English versions were signed and sealed, he himself would authenticate and sign the Latin versions.[241] If this casual remark brought an expression of wonder from Mylius—as well it might have—this was perhaps the occasion of a further statement by Milton that Mylius remembered and recorded later: 'Lycurgus, son of Dryas, because he dared to fight with the gods, especially Bacchus, was afflicted with perpetual blindness by Saturnian Jove.'[242]

The next day, assured that the documents were going to be sent to Parliament at last, Mylius went to Scobell, the Clerk of Parliament, and obtained his promise to take them to the Speaker for signing.[243] Presumably this happened, and it remained to await the Council's pleasure about arranging a farewell audience, which did not occur until the afternoon of 2 March. There was again much ceremony; and Sir Peter Wentworth made a polite speech, which Milton then translated into Latin for Mylius's benefit.[244] Four days later, on 6 March 1652, Mylius made his final visit to Milton, afterwards noting in his diary that, whereas his benefactor had presented him with copies in English and Latin of the long-sought safeguard, the latter copies 'sub manus propriae subscriptione', Milton was totally blind at the age of forty-two, in the very prime of his life. The envoy returned to Oldenburg with a sense of personal gratitude toward the great defender of the English people, and a sense of awe at the tragedy which had befallen him.[245]

* * *

For John Milton, and Mary too, these were the months of crisis. She was expecting her baby soon. He was determined not to be helpless. Probably he let the Council understand that he intended to do his work as usual, except, perhaps, for future attendance at conferences with ambassadors.[246] On 3 March they had approved for translation a letter to Queen Christina of Sweden—she who had so graciously approved the *Defensio*, according to report, and so regally dismissed the crestfallen Salmasius. The letter was concerned with other matters, and Milton had not been mentioned in the Council's order for translation, but he attended to it immediately, nevertheless.[247] On 8 March he was ordered to begin translation of a lengthy document in the negotiations still going on with the Dutch ambassadors.[248] The next day, however, the Council stipulated that the translation must be ready by the afternoon of 11 March, and the Committee for Foreign Affairs was asked to consider the problem of additional secretarial assistance.[249]

On 11 March Georg Rudolph Weckherlin was appointed Secretary-Assistant for the business of foreign affairs.[250] He was the scholarly German who had served in Milton's post for many years under the Parliament and who had retired in 1649 because of illness. He was now nearing seventy, and his health was still poor, but his recall was evidently considered essential to the efficiency of the Council, which had already, on 2 February, hired someone simply to translate French papers for its committee on foreign affairs. The pressure of work was increasing steadily. The letters of credence of a resident from Hamburg and the other Hanse towns were read in Parliament on 25 February; on 9 March an agent from Denmark delivered his credentials. France was the only important nation which had still to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic, although Louis de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, on his own responsibility had sent an agent, who was received by Parliament on 31 March. March was a distressing month for the Council. Not only was its Latin Secretary completely blind; its General Secretary, the useful Gualter Frost, suddenly died. On 29 March a new General Secretary, John Thurloe, was appointed to the vital position.[251] It was 'Mirk Monday', the day of a great solar eclipse.

With the veteran Weckherlin to help, Milton's responsibilities were considerably lightened, although psychologically he needed to be kept busy. Within the space of a few weeks he translated at least four letters of state and another paper to be sent to the Dutch ambassadors.[252] On 31 March he had to translate a letter to the Spanish ambassador.[253] On 6 April he was ordered to translate letters to Hamburg and to the Hanse towns.[254] On 7 April the Council specifically ordered its letter to King Frederick III of Denmark to be translated by Weckherlin, but Milton did this one too.[255] One cannot be positive, but the records suggest that the blind man was doing more than his share, struggling, perhaps, to convince both himself and his employers that his affliction was not an insuperable handicap—that he was still able, God willing, to carry on the work to which he had been called.

The exact date is uncertain, but at some point during 1652, it would seem, he began to learn Dutch, a currently useful language that was not yet in his extraordinary linguistic repertory. His teacher was Roger Williams, a visitor from the New World, who gladly learned much in the process from his pupil. They doubtless discussed methods of teaching a spoken language, a subject in which Williams was much interested.[256]

Although a year and some months had now passed, the long-awaited reply of Salmasius had not yet appeared. When it came, Milton would try to answer it, though blind; as for other printed criticisms, he would ignore them, saving himself for the major antagonist. Actually, in 1652 there were at least three new publications which attacked the *Defensio*. One of these, by far the least offensive, was printed in London itself, on or before 18 February: it was some anonymous *Observations concerning the Original of Government, upon Mr. Hobbes's Leviathan, Mr. Milton against Salmasius, H. Grotius' De Jure Belli, Mr. Hunton's Treatise of Monarchy*. This pamphlet consisted of ninety-five pages, only eleven of which (pages 12–22) were devoted to Milton. The author, supposed by some to be the episcopal divine Dr. Henry Hammond, was in fact Sir Robert Filmer, a studious gentleman who lived quietly in East Sutton, Kent, having suffered greatly for his Royalist sympathies during the civil war. Filmer offered a brief, dignified, and respectful criticism of Milton's views on government as expressed not only in the *Defensio* but also in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. Successfully isolating some of the more important doctrines of the lengthy *Defensio*, he took Milton to task for his failure to define clearly such fundamental concepts as 'king' and 'people'. Having a carefully thought-out theory of his own—a theory of patriarchal government—he argued without acrimony, and without pious horror, that Milton's generalities led to nothing but confusion.[257]

Back in 1645 Milton had closed his *Colasterion* by saying:

> If any man equal to the matter shall think it appertains him to take in hand this controversy, either excepting against aught written, or persuaded he can show better how this question of such moment to be thoroughly known may receive a true determination . . . if his intents be sincere to the public, and shall carry him on without bitterness to the opinion or to the person dissenting, let him not, I entreat him, guess . . . that I account it any displeasure done me to be contradicted in print; but as it leads to the attainment of anything more true, shall esteem it a benefit, and shall know how to return his civility and fair argument . . .

When at last the unprecedented happened, and the sincerity of this promise found a challenge, Milton met 'civility and fair argument' with dark silence. We do not know what he ever thought of Filmer's method of attack. He perhaps felt that eleven pages hardly merited his notice. If, however, he had felt like replying, and had adopted the thoughtful tone of Filmer's essay, our knowledge of his political philosophy might have profited greatly.

Dare we speculate about Milton's thoughts during the first half-year of his total blindness? That he tried hard to keep busy is evident, but, thrust in upon himself, there were inevitably times in which he could only wonder about his future. If he thought also about the past, there were loved or friendly faces to remember, some no more to be seen even by those blessed with sight. In early 1651 two people whom he remembered well from childhood, Dr. Theodore Diodati, Charles's father, and Mrs. Rebecca Young, his tutor's wife, had died. A year later it was John Rouse of Oxford.[258] (He had not sent Rouse copies of *The Tenure of Kings* and *Eikonoklastes*; he must remember to send them, some day, to the Bodleian Library.) For one who had spent so much of his life with books, the prospect of no more reading, save through the eyes of others, must have been particularly painful. Study of a sort was, of course, still possible, but casual reading, keeping up with current books, making discoveries by sampling—these former delights were to be enjoyed no more. (Did someone, in 1652, call his attention to Edward Benlowes's *Theophila*, with its scattered echoes of Milton's own poetry?[259] Had he himself, in 1650, when so busy with the *Defensio*, noticed the echoes of his early verse in Robert Baron's *Pocula Castalia*?[260]) Poetry, in those first months of adjustment to blindness, he may not even have allowed himself to think about.

It was 2 April 1652 when Milton's role in the Racovian Catechism scandal had been aired before Parliament, and the offending book ordered to be publicly burned. Exactly one month later, on Sunday, 2 May, somewhat before three o'clock in the morning, Milton's fourth child, another daughter, was born. The father was never to see her face. Nor could he see his wife's face when she died of childbirth three days later.[261] Mary and he had been married for ten years, and had lived as man and wife for about six and a half. Now she was gone. She was but twenty-seven when she died. Her husband, weary, strangely old at forty-three, found himself alone with four motherless children: Anne, the lame one, almost six; little Mary, about three and a half; and two babies. Was this a further trial sent of God? Could spiritual light be glimpsed through so much gloom? Could words express such desolation?

The new child, born through death, and known through darkness, was baptized Deborah. The name meant 'a word'. Deborah was a prophetess, a bringer of glad tidings to a people sore oppressed. 'Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song . . .'

# 11. Self-Defence, 1652–1656

Like any other father, a blind man can take pride in the growth of a son. More than other fathers, surely, he feels helpless and crushed when a son falls ill and dies. Milton's boy, the baby John, was fifteen months old when this happened. The tragedy struck about six weeks after the mother's death. We do not know the exact date, or the cause. Long afterwards, Edward Phillips blamed 'the ill-usage or bad constitution of an ill-chosen nurse'. If either was the case, there was reason for remorse as well as sorrow. A most pathetic aspect of the event is the fact that Milton himself did not know exactly when he lost his only son. After Mary's death his children were almost certainly put under the care of Mrs. Powell or someone else, and were temporarily separated from their blind father.[1]

Before the shock of the second death, while he was still in mourning for Mary, Milton had returned to the writing of poetry. So far as we know, he had composed no English verse for almost four years—none since the futile sonnet to Fairfax in 1648. In May 1652, however, it afforded him relief to try, not an elegy, but another such sonnet, similar in construction, even similar in purpose. He had earlier begged General Fairfax to use his great military prestige in rectifying affairs of state, but the general had neglected to seize his opportunity. Now, Cromwell was commander-in-chief and the hero of the day; in 1651 Parliament had even issued a new coin exhibiting 'Peace and Truth' as the fruits of the great battles won on the banks of the Darwen in 1648, and more recently at Dunbar and Worcester. Milton praised these victories, much as he had praised those of Fairfax before:

> Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud
> Not of war only, but detractions rude,
> Guided by faith and matchless fortitude
> To Peace and Truth thy glorious way hast plowed,
> And on the neck of crownèd fortune proud
> Hast reared God's trophies and His work pursued,
> While Darwen stream with blood of Scots imbrued,
> And Dunbar's field resounds thy praises loud,
> And Worcester's laureate wreath . . .

This tribute was sincere, for Milton was still impressed by the providential nature of events and felt that divine power had provided England with her 'chief of men'. The words, too, were charged with significance, for the poet himself had experienced 'detractions rude' in his own role as literary defender of the Republic, and, recently visited by birth and death, he was in special need of 'faith and matchless fortitude'.

The sonnet was composed, however, not to compliment Cromwell, but to urge him to use his influence in other business concerning God: the freedom of religion under the Commonwealth. In recent months proposals had been made by certain Independent ministers with a design to perpetuating an Established Church with a state-paid and state-controlled clergy. The idea had been closely connected with the hue and cry over the Racovian Catechism, and Milton feared that the Parliament, frightened as it was by an apparent excess of toleration, might favour such proposals. He urged Cromwell, therefore, to throw the weight of his personal prestige on the side of religious liberty:

> yet much remains
> To conquer still: peace hath her victories
> No less renowned than war; new foes arise
> Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
> Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw.

The petition was subtly and eloquently put, appealing to both the pride and the piety of the General, who doubtless would recognize the echo of Cicero in the balancing of the glories of peace against those of war. Milton had learned something of diplomacy in his three years of work for the Council.[2]

It will be observed that the sonnet to Cromwell, although it follows the pattern of the earlier appeal to Fairfax, is more specific and direct in its wording. The phrasing throughout is masterly; the couplet close, unusual in Milton's sonneteering, has an epigrammatic force; and the delayed 'turn' of thought makes the transition to the sonnet's real purpose less obvious and abrupt. The author, incidentally, must have learned from this experiment that the sonnet is an ideal poetic form for a blind man. He dictated another soon afterwards; it was composed, in fact, but a few weeks after the death of his son.

Cromwell's attitude on the question of a state church was still in doubt on 3 July, but Cromwell's friend, Sir Henry Vane, had long been a staunch supporter of religious toleration. He was certainly one of the members of the Council of State referred to by Milton seven years later, in *A Treatise of Civil Power*; the Latin Secretary then declared that he remembered hearing 'often for several years' at meetings of the Council some persons 'so well joining religion with civil prudence, and yet so well distinguishing the different power of either, and this not only voting but frequently reasoning why it should be so, that if any there present had been before of an opinion contrary, he might doubtless have departed thence a convert in that point, and have confessed that then both Commonwealth and religion will at length, if ever, flourish in Christendom when either they who govern discern between civil and religious, or they only who so discern shall be admitted to govern' (VI. 2). In 1652, therefore, Milton hoped that Vane's influence would be great enough to affect Cromwell and to defeat the proposals before Parliament. Sir Henry was a prodigy; although four years younger than Milton, he had been prominent in public life since the outbreak of the civil war, and, a member of the Council of State from its beginning, he was considered one of the ablest administrators in the Government:

Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old,
Than whom a better senator ne'er held
The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms, repelled
The fierce Epirot and the African bold . . .

Particularly skilled in international diplomacy, Vane had recently busied himself in detecting the drift of the States-General of Holland, who seemed to be threatening war with England:

Whether to settle peace or to unfold
The drift of hollow states, hard to be spelled;
Then to advise how war may best, upheld,
Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,
In all her equipage . . .

When Cromwell had marched against the Scots, Vane had conspicuously demonstrated his ability to supply an army in the field, and now it looked as though his talent for logistics would be needed again. Milton recognized the versatility of this unusual statesman, but was chiefly concerned to remind him of his religious convictions and responsibilities. He offered no appeal, as in the sonnet to Cromwell—only a timely word of encouragement and approval:

Besides to know
Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
What severs each, thou hast learned which few have done.
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe;
Therefore on thy firm hand Religion leans
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

Freedom of conscience in England depended now upon Vane's support, as a mother might lean trustingly upon the strong arm of her boy. The figure is poignant; one father and mother were never to lean so.[3]

The writing of these two poems, at such a time, was a characteristic thing for Milton to do. When intimate emotion became unutterable, when the nearest care strained endurance, almost always he sought release by focusing his attention upon some other concern, and forcing the stubborn words to follow. There had been occasions when the other concern had been similar enough to facilitate a rich transmutation of feeling. He wrote no elegy when his mother died, but seven months later, in *Lycidas*, he found a healing outlet for his brooding upon death. *Areopagitica* was a like effort to enlarge and sublimate a deeply personal situation. On the other hand, when Charles Diodati died, he wrote a tribute to Manso—and began an epic poem on King Arthur before he ventured, nearly two years after the loss, to express his grief directly. And when Mary deserted him, back in 1642, he penned a half-humorous sonnet on a threatened siege of London, and only later transferred his shock and humiliation to a studious interest in the laws governing divorce. For a man like Milton, writing on any subject was a method of self-defence, or self-healing.

But the subject of the two sonnets composed in 1652 was truly close to his heart. He was worried about the future, not of himself alone, but also of his country. In three years he had lost his eyesight and his health—and a number of illusions. The English of whom he had once hoped noble things were plainly 'an ungrateful and perverse generation'. He had come to realize that the Republic had been achieved by a determined few, that the government in which he believed was not representative of the popular will, and that most people were in fact not fit for freedom. He had learned the hard political reality that 'natural rights' can be dangerous unless accompanied by wisdom and virtue. He had lost his faith in the public, and was fast losing it in the Parliament, for after three years there was still no free church, still no adequate machinery to ensure liberty—only the increasing threat of 'a multiplicity of laws'. We can see now (as he himself may have seen then) that in defending the Commonwealth against Salmasius he had tried to justify a perplexing succession of events in terms of the popular good, not the popular will; and more and more he was inclining to the risky belief that progress depends upon successful leaders (always sent by God, of course) who understand 'what use to make of their victory'. If the majority of people were so stupid as to want a new tyranny over conscience, then a strong man like Cromwell should interfere.

Milton hated to see his country go to war with the United Provinces. He was thoroughly aware of the political situation, for between December and May he had done some of the translating in the negotiations with the three Dutch ambassadors, and in June he had co-operated in an exciting demonstration of the efficiency of the English secret service. On 19 May, while the treaty was still under discussion, there had been an unfortunate brush between naval forces of the two nations—the kind of incident which hotheads on both sides regard as provocation to war—and the States-General had hastily sent an ambassador-extraordinary to apologize and explain. This ambassador, the illustrious Adrian Pauw, was ceremoniously received by Parliament on 11 June. But even before he arrived, the English had procured a copy of his official instructions, had given them to Milton for translation, and had prepared their answers. (Milton had asked either John or Edward Phillips to do the translating for him. As Edward tells the story, it was a 'kinsman that was then with him' who assisted—and long remembered.)[4]

Milton was very favourably impressed by Adrian Pauw. They did not meet; during most of the ambassador's visit to London Milton was in mourning for the death of his son; but before his departure on 30 June the Dutch diplomat sent a number of courteous messages to the author of the famous *Defensio*. The blind secretary remembered the foreigner's thoughtfulness with especial gratitude: 'It were an injury to forget your departed spirit, Adrian Pauw, who, with the high dignity of ambassador to us, and the glory and ornament of Holland, were solicitous to inform me by frequent messages, though I never happened to see you, of your great and distinguished kindness towards me.' Accused later of having favoured the war which other men had considered 'inevitable', Milton declared: 'You are indeed greatly deceived if you think there is any Englishman more friendly than I, more closely allied in sympathy, to the United Provinces; if you imagine there is anyone who has a higher opinion of that republic; who prizes more and who more often applauds their industry, their arts, ingenuity, and liberty; whose will was more abhorrent from beginning a war with them; who prosecuted it, when begun, with less zeal, and when ended, who more sincerely rejoiced; lastly, who at any time gave less credit to those who would disparage the Dutch.'[5] Nevertheless, when Parliament adopted, on 7 July 1652, an official Declaration of Causes of War against the Dutch, Milton was called upon (20 July) to assist in the publication, if not in the usual Latin translation.[6]

The Secretary for Foreign Languages was never, of course, a voting member of the Council of State, and there is no reason to suppose that he was ever consulted on matters of foreign or domestic policy. Like any other citizen, he may have enjoyed some personal influence with individual members of the Council, such as Bradshaw or Vane, but officially, we are warned by one of his earliest biographers, 'he was a stranger to their private councils'.[7] Officially he was a clerical assistant, meeting occasionally with the Council, more often with the Committee on Foreign Affairs, but acting as a trusted servant of his employers, following orders and making himself useful. Gualter Frost and, after him, John Thurloe, as General Secretaries, were far more influential persons than Milton, since the Council depended upon them to handle routine matters. Marchamont Needham, as a hired journalistic mouthpiece of the Government, was doubtless more effective than Milton in the moulding of public opinion in England. The unique distinction of the Secretary for Foreign Languages was his *Defensio*. Once, and once only, he had been asked to speak for his country on an international stage. His performance, however, had been so spectacular that many foreigners, when they thought of the leaders of the new Republic, thought first of Cromwell, and then of Milton. Little wonder if the actual leaders of the new Republic were disturbed, at times, by the prominence of their literary clerk. They were grateful for his achievement; after he became blind they kept him on as Secretary; but they could hardly have done otherwise. To have dismissed the celebrated defender of the English people would have been damaging to the Republic's prestige abroad.

Milton's own attitude toward his somewhat peculiar status after 1651 was compounded of several factors. Long before his employment by the Council he had found satisfaction in thinking of himself as a citizen-adviser to the Government. Not linked to any party by self-interest, he had relished his privilege of speaking freely as a disinterested, public-spirited individual. It pleased him to be able to look back and truthfully say: 'These services of mine, performed within private walls, I gratuitously bestowed at one time upon the church, at another upon the Commonwealth, while neither Commonwealth nor church bestowed on me in return anything beyond security. To be sure, I gained a good conscience and a fair repute among good men, and the deeds themselves rendered this freedom of speech honourable to me. Although some men gained advantages, others honours, for doing nothing, no man ever saw me canvassing for preferment, no man ever saw me in quest of anything through the influence of friends, fixed with supplicatory look to the doors of Parliament, or clinging to the vestibules of the lower assemblies.'[8] When he finally became a minor official of the Government, Milton retained enough of his former conception of service to cushion his disappointment (if he ever felt disappointment) over lack of advancement. His writing the sonnets to Cromwell and Vane was a significant gesture; they were contributions, not from a hired servant of the state, but from a man of letters who loved his country and who still prided himself on freedom from all factional attachments. As his anonymous biographer recognized and emphasized, the most conspicuous illustrations of Milton's effort to be unpartisan were the lofty perorations with which he concluded his *Defensio* and two following books, taking 'care all along strictly to define and persuade to true liberty', and 'also, little less than prophetically', to pronounce 'the punishments due to the abusers of that specious name.'[9] But the anonymous biographer was not the first to notice and applaud Milton's courage in lecturing his fellow countrymen, and his superiors too, in the very process of defending them; John Lilburne pointed this out in May 1652, quoting at length from the 'epilogue' of the *Defensio*, and urging Cromwell and his confederates to take the excellent advice 'of their valiant and learned champion', offered with so 'much faithfulness and freedom'.[10]

On the other hand, the author of the *Defensio*, having been asked by the

Republic to defend the Republic, developed in time a highly exaggerated notion of his achievement. He had met and crippled the foremost ship in a formidable Armada, but in his exultation he minimized the other battles and the destruction wrought by wind and wave. Milton firmly believed that he had saved the nation in 1651. If we point out, in simple truth, that Parliament and the English people took a larger view of the conflict—that few persons of his own day, and few historians of ours, could accept his estimate—we do not discredit Milton or deny his genuine celebrity in Europe. Milton's pride in the *Defensio* was something more than the petty swelling of successful authorship. His blindness had brought a profound spiritual need to believe in the importance of the labour that had hastened blindness. Remembering this, we may wish to mix charity with candour in recording his attitude.

Foreigners visiting London continued to seek out the man who had written the *Defensio*. Many came, we know, out of genuine respect and admiration; others came, perhaps, out of curiosity or fancied diplomacy. (Milton was so rightly certain of his own ability that he was sometimes unable to recognize flattery.) We know the names of some who visited him in this period—Leo van Aitzema from the Hanse towns, Henry Oldenburg from Bremen[11]—and they were doubtless two among many. Letters from the Continent were also beginning to arrive—letters from admirers he had never met. In June 1652, the month of his double bereavement, he was moved to answer one such letter, which had come from Paris. The writer was a Greek, Leonard Philaras (or Villeré, as he was known in France), an able diplomat and scholar, ambassador to the French court from the Duke of Parma. Milton had first heard of Philaras from René Augier, a naturalized Frenchman who had been Parisian agent for the Parliament from 1644 to 1650, but who was now used in special diplomatic business by the Council of State. Philaras had expressed his admiration for the great *Defensio* in a letter to Augier; later he had ventured to send its author a message through Augier, and, as a means of identifying himself, had accompanied it with a published portrait and eulogistic sketch of his life. Finally, he had written directly to Milton, saying, among other things, that he could wish Milton's eloquence next employed for the liberation of Greece.

Athens was the ancient home of eloquence, and Philaras was a native of Athens. Milton was struck by the symbolic significance of this tribute. As he said in reply, he had studied Greek literature all his life and it had deeply influenced his own writing. He could do nothing, of course, to free modern Greece from the Turks; indeed, he told Philaras, if he had the power to send the English army and navy on such a glorious errand, it would not be enough. Greece must first deserve liberty. Let Philaras re-awaken in the hearts of his countrymen the courage, the industry, the fortitude which they once possessed, and 'then, I am confident, the

Greeks will not be wanting to themselves, nor will any other nation be wanting to the Greeks'. Who could do this better, who could more appropriately remind them of their ancient virtues, than a native son in whom those virtues had been notably revived? Milton acknowledged with pleasure the many accomplishments of his correspondent; he was happy and proud to receive praise from a living Athenian whose talents (he had noted from the published eulogy) were so great. As he put it two years later, in a public summary of the reception of the *Defensio*: 'Even Greece herself, Athens herself, apparently revived once more, had contributed her applause by the voice of one of her sons, the noble Philaras.'[12]

Although Milton's political convictions were fervently republican, he maintained, in so far as it was humanly possible, a no less fervent allegiance to the Republic of Letters. One of his early biographers explained and illustrated the distinction: 'As he was not linked to one party by self-interest, so neither was he divided from the other by animosity, but was forward to do any of them good offices when their particular cases afforded him ground to appear on their behalf—and especially if, on the score of wit or learning, they could lay claim to his peculiar patronage. Of which were instances, among others, the grandchild of the famous Spenser, a papist suffering in his concerns in Ireland, and Sir William Davenant when taken prisoner, for both whom he procured relief.' I shall have occasion to mention Spenser's grandson in my next chapter, but we may notice here that, sailing from France to Virginia, Davenant had been taken at sea early in 1650 and had been imprisoned at Cowes Castle in the Isle of Wight, where he busied himself with the composition of *Gondibert*. On 4 July, angered by the murder of Ascham at Madrid, Parliament had voted to try the famous dramatist and five other eminent Royalists for their lives. Davenant was removed to the Tower of London, and he languished there for some time. It was in 1652, apparently, that Milton and some others interceded successfully on his behalf; by 7 October of this year he was at liberty as a prisoner at large.[13]

Another story illustrates a different aspect of Milton's devotion to literature. Dr. Brian Walton, former chaplain to the King, having also been imprisoned for a while, and having been ejected from his various church offices, was in 1652 living in London and using his enforced leisure for a project stirring to the scholarly imagination. He proposed nothing less than a polyglot edition of the Bible. The scheme had been encouraged by Selden, Ussher, and other learned men of the age, but it involved so much expense that it seemed almost hopeless without government subsidy or public support on a great scale. Milton, who had doubtless been acquainted with Walton since 1624, when the latter had served as curate in the parish of All Hallows, Bread Street, seems to have placed the Polyglot Bible before the Council of State as a design deserving their patronage. On 11 July 1652 the Council decided: 'That it be returned in answer to Dr. Brian Walton that, upon the reading and consideration of his petition, wherein he offers an edition of the Bible in several tongues, the Council are of opinion that the work propounded by him is very honourable and deserving encouragement, but find that the matter of his desires therein contained is more proper for the consideration of the Parliament than the Council.' Milton was not present at this meeting, but his interest in the matter is proved by a memorandum of 20 July: that the Council's decision on the proposed Bible be communicated to him. Walton eventually published his multilingual masterpiece (1654–7), and there are reasons to believe that Milton persisted in his support, perhaps aiding to some extent with the scholarly problems involved.[14]

Through all the months of 1652 the author of the *Defensio* waited for the reply of Salmasius. Reports from the Continent were emphatic: the rebuttal was in angry preparation; it might be published at any time. Milton regarded it as a daily threat.[15] Abroad, men continued to talk about both Milton and his book. Adriaan Vlacq, a printer at The Hague, inquired through Samuel Hartlib whether the famous Englishman had anything else needing publication; if so, the superior facilities of his press were at Milton's disposal. In early July it was becoming known in Europe that blindness had befallen the Republic's defender.[16] In August Milton was rumoured dead.[17]

On 23 August Edward Hyde noted regretfully that the *Defensio* had found its way into Germany, and he hoped that it would be burned and banned there as in France.[18] He reckoned without the Germans. The book was much read. Caspar Ziegler of Leipzig discussed the English regicides before an academic audience in September 1652, and later published his *Exercitationes* (1653) along with a *Dissertatio* on certain passages in Milton by Jacob Schaller.[19] On 13 November 1652 Professor Schaller presided at the defence of a dissertation on Milton by Erhard Kieffer, part of which was published at Strassburg in 1652.[20] Both Kieffer's and Schaller's studies were to be reprinted in 1657. Meanwhile, 'all the books of Miltonius' were ordered to be searched for and confiscated at Ratisbon in December 1653,[21] but the *Defensio* continued to be read and talked about almost everywhere.

Its offshoot, the *Responsio* of John Phillips, found enough readers to justify three reprintings in 1652, and Dr. John Bramhall, indignant over its attack on him as the alleged author of the *Apologia*, wrote Milton a very reproachful letter. The letter is lost, but we know its contents from a later reference to it. Bramhall vigorously denied any connexion with the silly book ascribed to him; in fact, he had never read it. The lying, abusive *Responsio* was composed, he felt sure, by Milton himself, and Milton had better beware. Bramhall had known the late Bishop Chappell; he knew how Chappell had turned away his young pupil when he was a tutor at Christ's College. If Salmasius told as much about Milton as Bramhall could tell, he would make the defender of regicide want to hang himself. But Bramhall had no wish to wound England through Milton's sides; he desired only a retraction of the lies about him in the pamphlet allegedly authored by Phillips.[22]

The anonymous *Apologia*, its authorship still a mystery, was twice reprinted at Antwerp in 1652.[23] While it was being further discussed, another attack on Milton's *Defensio* appeared from an unexpected quarter. Purporting to have been printed in Dublin, some time in 1652 there appeared an anonymous pamphlet of 120 pages entitled *Carolus I. Britanniarum Rex, a Securi et Calamo Miltonii Vindicatus* ('Charles I, King of the British Isles, Vindicated from the Executioner's Axe and Pen of Milton'). The writer makes a modest, unspectacular attempt to refute the arguments in the *Defensio*, offering his words as 'a preliminary skirmish' before the great battle expected from Salmasius. He alludes to Milton's views on divorce, and suggests that Milton put away his own wife from jealousy, but in general he keeps his promise of not descending to insults. He has ventured to enter the controversy, he says, only because Salmasius has delayed in demolishing this apologist for murder.[24]

Milton did not answer this brief *Vindicatus*; indeed, he never mentioned it. Compared with a new attack that appeared in midsummer of 1652, it paled into insignificance. Probably in late August, certainly after the outbreak of war with the Dutch, Milton was handed copies of the most brilliantly scathing rebuke he had ever received in print. He was attending a meeting of the Council when this work, scarcely complete in sheets, was first produced before his blind eyes. Its printer, Adriaan Vlacq—the same man who had recently solicited a manuscript from Milton—had rushed the sheets, almost wet from the press, to his correspondent in England, Samuel Hartlib. Soon after the unstitched copy had been given him, Milton was sent another copy by the Council's Committee of Examinations, this time with an intimation that the Government expected him to make a suitable reply.[25]

Someone, of course, had the painful task of reading aloud to Milton the 188 pages of this vigorous and venomous rebuttal. First, there was the title: *Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Coelum adversus Parricidas Anglicanos* ('A Cry to Heaven of the King's Blood against the English Parricides'). The book was anonymous—but it was clearly not by Salmasius. The dedication to Charles II, signed by that incredible publisher, Vlacq, praised Salmasius most extravagantly, and spoke of the great Reply in preparation, a reply which would strangle the rebel leaders and castigate their defender as he deserved. The dedication epitomized the author of the *Defensio* in the words used by Virgil to describe Polyphemus, 'a hideous monster, ugly, huge, bereft of sight'. As for the war then beginning, Vlacq ventured to hope that the Dutch would dispose of the English as easily as Salmasius would make an end of Milton. A preface by the author himself followed. He explained that his English friends had persuaded him to suppress his name, but he declared himself thoroughly acquainted with both England and her present leaders, who were inhuman creatures inspired by the Devil. In the body of his book, which was divided into eight chapters, he proclaimed the crimes of the parricides against royalty, against the people, against God and the reformed churches, against all kings and all peoples. At the close of this tirade were two sets of Latin verses, one a tribute in Horatian stanzas to the incomparable Salmasius, the other, 245 lines of pungent invective against 'the bestial blackguard, John Milton, advocate of parricides and parricide'. Having earlier characterized Milton as a starving grammarian with a venal pen—one who had been expelled from Cambridge for profligacy, had fled to Italy in disgrace, and had returned to England as a fomenter of rebellion and licence—the writer ended with an iambic storm of abuse. The author of the infamous *Defensio* was an ignoble cur, a blotch, an ulcer, an execrable villain, a wretch more vile than Cromwell, a pest more despicable than a louse.[26]

Whence came these harsh words out of the darkness? Who was the author of this bitter *Clamor*? At first no one seemed to know. Hartlib wrote immediately to Vlacq, upbraiding him for penning a dedication so violent in abuse against the man to whom he had recently offered his services. Vlacq blandly replied that the dedication was not really his own—that he had received it from Salmasius, who had asked him as a favour to publish it and to sign his name to it as printer. If Milton wished to answer the book, he would be delighted to publish a rebuttal. He was a businessman, not a politician, and the English were indeed unworldly if they expected him to overlook anything that increased his profits.[27]

Vlacq was right about the commercial value of the *Clamor*; although it came forth in the summer, two further editions were called for before the year ended. Public identification of its author first appeared in *Mercurius Politicus* on 20/30 September, when a Leyden correspondent named him as one Monsieur Morus. As time went by, the identification was corroborated by many letters from abroad, addressed to Milton or to other officials of the government, and unsavoury details about the life of the man also began to accumulate. Morus was obviously a scoundrel. Milton had never heard of him until the publication of the *Clamor*, but every new report from the Continent only confirmed his lifetime conviction that a bad book was always the product of a bad man.[28]

Alexander More, or Morus, was a native Frenchman, the son of a Scottish Presbyterian father and a Gallic mother. Until July 1649 he had been a preacher and a professor of Greek at Geneva, where both his orthodoxy and his personal morality had long been under suspicion. Preserved in the public library of Geneva (so Milton was informed) were charges of adultery which had been formally drawn up against him by the presbyters. More had escaped disgrace, however, by receiving, through the recommendation of Salmasius, the offer of a professorship of theology at Middleburg in Holland. He had gone to Middleburg, but now, after three years, his depraved nature had reasserted itself, and his latest crime was a public scandal. A guest in the home of Salmasius, he had seduced the waiting-maid of Madame Salmasius. The poor girl was pregnant, and Madame Salmasius, making no secret of her own dislike for More, insisted that the preacher marry his victim and take the consequences. 'I will move hell to ruin him!' she announced to the tittering world.[29]

Here was a clamour indeed. Milton listened with grim satisfaction as details of the story unfolded. The name of the servant-girl was Bontia or Pontia. An unknown wit had celebrated the affair in a memorable distich:

Galli è concubitu gravidam te, Pontia, Mori
  Quis bene moratam, morigeramque neget?

Milton enjoyed this. The Latin puns defy translation, but a rough English equivalent of the lines might be:

Who will deny, O Pontia expanded,
You bear a little more than More demanded?

The epigram was printed in the same number of *Mercurius Politicus* which identified More as the author of the anonymous *Clamor*, and it soon evoked learned laughter in a dozen European cities.

How should the scurrilous *Clamor* be answered? There was no doubt in Milton's mind as to the method. When an evil man throws mud, he should be buried alive in it. When a bad man grows abusive, he should be scourged with the iron tongue of Truth. The Cry of the Royal Blood had come from the filthy mouth of a fornicating priest, and the book was best rebuked by exhibiting the character of its author.

Nevertheless, Milton decided not to answer. He had excellent reasons, which doubtless convinced his superiors. The misdeeds of More were becoming widely known, and his writings must eventually be discredited by his life, even among Royalists. Salmasius was still the leading spokesman for the enemy, as More himself readily conceded, and the long-awaited reply might be published at any moment. When it came, a *Defensio Secunda* would have to be prepared with all possible speed, and Milton's health, though improved by the cessation of deperate remedies for blindness, was still poor. He thought it essential, therefore, to conserve his energies for the more important foe, leaving Monsieur Morus to the scolding of Madame Salmasius and the censure of public opinion.[30]

Despite his travels and his work as librarian at St. James's, John Dury was making progress with his translation of the *Eikonoklastes* into French, and Milton assisted him as best he could on points of style. The Council had ordered this translation on 20 May 1651, and by 15 November 1652 it was at last ready. The book was printed by Dugard immediately, but, perhaps because of the war with the Dutch, copies were not at once exported to the Continent. It was 5 April 1653 before the Council finally arranged for the book to be transported into France custom free.[31]

Meanwhile, Milton resumed the translation of state letters, and prepared one or more for the Council during every month in the second half of 1652. We know of at least eleven on which he worked. Four of these were addressed to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, thanking him for his protection of English vessels against Dutch warships (29 July and 2 September), and, later, expressing the Republic's gratitude in terms of specific concessions (9 November and 14 December).[32] Three were addressed to the Spanish ambassador, the first a summary of previous negotiations (10 August), the other two dealing with a complaint from Cardenas and an encouraging report of Spanish friendliness (11 November).[33] Milton also translated some of the concluding papers in the unfruitful negotiations with Denmark which had begun on 26 May, and which ended on 29 October with no treaty settled. The Council attempted a final clarification of its views on 1 October, and three weeks later informed the two Danish ambassadors that their powers were deemed insufficient to consider a treaty as a whole.[34] On 6 November, Milton translated a letter to the Danish king, notifying him that Richard Bradshaw, the Hamburg resident, was being sent to Denmark to deal with a crisis involving English shipping.[35] There was also a brief note (29 December) to the Duke of Venice, acknowledging the receipt of certain letters, and emphasizing England's desire for friendship.[36]

Portugal was among the countries which had now seen the desirability of coming to terms with the Republic. Having been rebuffed in its former attempt at a treaty through the offices of its envoy, Guimaraes, Portugal sent, in August 1652, an ambassador-extraordinary, Don Roderigo Sa, who was chamberlain to the King. Sa was received by Parliament with great formality on 30 September, and his concerns were referred, as a matter of course, to the Council. Milton was involved in the successful negotiations which followed, but we do not know to what extent. The only surviving order in which he is specifically mentioned is one of 7 October, asking him to translate into English a paper just submitted by the ambassador, and to bring it to the Council the following afternoon.[37]

On 1 December 1652, when the fifth Council of the Republic held its organizational meeting (with twenty-one out of forty members re-elected), Milton was kept on as Secretary for Foreign Languages.[38] It was already apparent, however, that youth and health were sorely needed in the business of translation. Milton's condition no longer allowed him to attend at conferences with ambassadors, and his 'enforced absence' (as he himself put it) was something of an inconvenience. Weckherlin, moreover, was an old man, and also in bad health. With international correspondence growing in volume, and more and more envoys arriving in England for treaties or other diplomatic negotiations, a more efficient solution to the clerical problem could not be long postponed. Milton was sensitive to the difficulty, although unwilling to admit any 'encumbrance of that which belongs to me' except for attendance at conferences. When matters finally came to a head, he had a recommendation to make.

Weckherlin died on 13 February 1653. Eight days later Milton wrote to his friend John Bradshaw, suggesting that if 'the Council shall think that I shall need any assistant in the performance of my place', they should seriously consider the qualifications of a scholarly young linguist of thirty-one, Andrew Marvell by name—

> a man whom both by report and the converse I have had with him, of singular desert for the State to make use of, who also offers himself if there be any employment for him. His father was the minister of Hull; and he hath spent four years abroad in Holland, France, Italy, and Spain, to very good purpose as I believe, and the gaining of those four languages. Besides, he is a scholar and well read in the Latin and Greek authors, and no doubt of an approved conversation, for he comes now lately out of the house of the Lord Fairfax who was General, where he was entrusted to give some instructions in the languages to the Lady his daughter. . . . it would be hard for them [the Council] to find a man so fit every way for that purpose as this gentleman, one who I believe in a short time would be able to do them as good service as Mr. Ascham.[39]

Marvell would call upon Bradshaw the following day, and Bradshaw could take his measure. Milton recommended him only because he desired to help the public to an able servant, and he admired Marvell enough to dismiss 'those jealousies and that emulation which mine own condition might suggest to me by bringing in such a coadjutor'.

Despite the ingenuous warmth of this recommendation, the Council chose another, and even younger, man. Philip Meadows was a recent M.A. of Queens' College, Cambridge, and he lacked some of Marvell's qualifications. On the other hand, his knowledge of languages was considered sufficient, and his personality gave promise of great usefulness in the social aspects of diplomacy. Only twenty-seven when he was appointed Latin Secretary, he was destined to be knighted in 1658 for conspicuous service as an English envoy to Portugal and Denmark. For three years, however, he acted as an assistant to Milton, whose destiny included neither knighthood nor posting 'o'er land and ocean without rest'.[40]

Our glimpses of Milton's thought and activity in the closing months of 1652, and in the first half of 1653, are disappointingly few. His acquaintance with Andrew Marvell is, of course, pleasant to record, for, whenever it began, it ripened with the years into a close friendship; and the younger man may have early submitted for Milton's judgement the refreshing garden poetry he had composed at Nunappleton House, while tutor to Mary Fairfax. His muse was already distinctive, vigorous and firm in intellectual control, warm with the colours of the Renaissance afterglow.

Cyriack Skinner, formerly Milton's pupil, now a trusted friend, probably brought the two poets together. Another old acquaintance, Richard Heath, was about this same time hoping to find lodgings near Milton (as Skinner eventually did). On 13 December 1652, four days after his forty-fourth birthday, Milton dictated a letter to Heath, obviously pleased by the latter's admiration and loyalty. He had become a respected minister, and a man of sound religious and political views. Modestly disclaiming any important part in Heath's education, Milton welcomed a renewal of their friendship and encouraged the young clergyman's wish to live in the neighbourhood. It would be pleasant to see more of one who so evidently had grown in virtue.[41]

Another figure out of the past appeared briefly in Milton's life during this period. Andrew Sandelands, a Scotsman, had been a Fellow of Christ's during the first five of Milton's seven years as a student there, but had vacated his fellowship in 1630 for a rectory in Suffolk. (It was Edward King, 'young Lycidas', who had succeeded him as Fellow.) Later Sandelands had enjoyed a parsonage in Yorkshire, from which, as a Royalist sympathizer and a known adherent of the notorious Montrose, he had been ejected by the Parliament. Like many other persons in this predicament, he was subsequently anxious to make himself useful to the new government. When England declared war on the Dutch, Sandelands came forward with a scheme for using the fir-woods of Scotland as a cheap and plentiful source of masts, timber, and tar for the English navy. This was probably in July 1652. Cromwell had been interested enough in the proposal to communicate it to the Council, and Sandelands had then gone to Scotland in December, at his own expense, to discuss ways and means with the English commanders on the spot, Major-General Richard Deane and Colonel Robert Overton. Perhaps because of his past association with Sandelands, Milton had interested himself in the project; he or someone else gave information about it to the Committee for Trade and Foreign Affairs on 28 December 1652; and on 3 January he dictated a letter (now lost) to the hopeful promoter. Sandelands replied on 15 January, from Edinburgh.[42]

The most interesting thing in the Scotsman's letter has no connexion with the stripping of northern woods. It is a request, most earnestly repeated, that Milton make him a present of a human skull. For nearly three years, high on a spike over the Edinburgh prison, the grinning, weather-beaten skull of the once-dashing Marquis of Montrose had looked down upon Jack Presbyter, and old Sandelands, as a faithful follower of the Royalist warrior, shuddered at the indignity to greatness. Would Milton, with all his influence, obtain for him this pitiful relic? His request, we must add, came to nothing, but it helps to explain the Milton–Sandelands relationship. Although a Scotsman and a Royalist, the former Fellow of Christ's agreed with Milton that the Presbyterians of his native land were 'the basest of men', sworn enemies to civil government and hypocrites at heart. The letter went on to say that his grand scheme for cheap timber, in order to succeed, depended upon government control, for the Scottish people would not co-operate and labour would have to be imported. His interviews with Deane and Overton had been unsatisfactory, as both men had been on the point of removal to other duties, but he had seen Colonel Robert Lilburne and had found him favourable. He sent Milton, for transmittal to the Council, a copy of the detailed report which he had just submitted to Lilburne, and also the Colonel's approving reply.

Sandelands wrote again on 29 March. He was then discouraged by the indifference of the state he was trying to serve, and, to make matters worse, he was running out of funds. In this letter, however, he tried a new method of ingratiating himself with the party in power. The Marquis of Argyle, he informed Milton, had pretended to sell the English all his cannon, but in reality he had buried forty-four pieces on the coast of Kintyre, recoverable in two days' time. Here was news of obvious military importance, and Milton turned the letter over to the proper authorities.[43]

Andrew Marvell, although he failed of appointment as Milton's assistant, soon found work of a congenial sort, perhaps through Milton's recommendation. Again he was employed as a tutor, this time to a young protégé of Oliver Cromwell himself. The boy was William Dutton, nephew and ward of the wealthy John Dutton, former Member of Parliament for Gloucestershire. Cromwell and Mr. Dutton had discussed, it seems, the desirability of marriage between William Dutton and Cromwell's youngest daughter, Frances; and by 1653 the prospective father-in-law had directly concerned himself with the remaining education of the youth. He placed him in the godly home of a respected nonconformist divine, John Oxenbridge, recently elected a Fellow of Eton; and to the Oxenbridge residence at Windsor he also sent a tutor of his own choosing. Marvell wrote to his new employer on 28 July 1653, thanking him for the confidence implied in the appointment, offering his early impressions of his young charge, and expressing great liking and respect for both Mr. and Mrs. Oxenbridge.[44]

When Marvell wrote this letter, Cromwell had been dictator of all England for three months. The *coup d'état* had come so suddenly, yet had seemed so inevitable, that men were more encouraged than disturbed. The desperate faith in successful leaders, expressed by Milton and felt by many, had produced at last a trial of *reductio ad Oliverum*.

Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament and its Council of State on 20 April 1653. These dubious remnants of representative government had enjoyed four years of power only because the army had once seen fit to invest them with nominal authority, and Cromwell was the increasingly influential head of the army. It is easy to understand how he made himself a dictator, but it is difficult to summarize the tangle of events that resulted in his decision. It would seem, among other things, that his great victory at Worcester had the ironic consequence of making the Rump overconfident. After Worcester, the only considerable threat to the new Republic was removed, and the Parliament not only faced a seeming eternity of unmolested power; they went about their business of lawmaking with a leisureliness appropriate to their optimism. Impatient with the red tape and delay, a group of army officers submitted a petition on 13 August 1652, urging greater speed in the progress of reformation. There were twelve articles in this petition, and the last reminded the Rump that since its legal existence ended on 3 November 1654, a bill settling the constitution of future parliaments was long overdue. Despite grumbling about army interference, the legislators turned promptly to the problem of their own dissolution. A bill covering the matter was reported from committee on 23 February 1653. It provided for early dissolution and the calling of a larger Parliament, with Scotland and Ireland represented. But it also continued the Rumpers in office without re-election, and gave them supervision over the voting on persons for the additional seats. Cromwell and his friends were outraged by the proposal.

There were, of course, a number of motives in the Rump's scheme for perpetuating itself. A new election was fraught with danger for the whole republican experiment. The people might choose to reverse all policies of the past four years, and even return the Stuarts. Representative government was safe with the Rump as representatives, they thought. Many of them also feared Cromwell's personal ambitions, but believed that the naval war with Holland might eventually reduce his dimensions as a popular hero. The war, declared in July 1652, had gone extremely well for the English. After many skirmishes and a few drawn battles, Admiral Robert Blake had won a great victory over van Tromp in February 1653. Even non-republicans were elated by the success of their brave countrymen against the Dutch. Something of the old Elizabethan pride in naval supremacy returned to the people, and patriotic feeling accentuated the prestige of the Parliament, which, without help from Cromwell, was conducting the war. The legislators were truly sanguine, therefore, about their plan for self-perpetuation. When Cromwell and his army officers suggested other expedients, they would not compromise. On 20 April 1653, fearing that further discussion might embarrass their scheme, they hurried a vote on the bill. Informed of what was happening, Cromwell went to the House, listened to the debate for a while in brooding silence, and then, convinced of what he was called by God to do, rose to speak. 'The hour is come,' he announced; 'the Lord hath done with you.' Some of the members protested the use of such language. 'Come, come,' he declared angrily, 'we have had enough of this; I will end your prating. It is not fit that you should sit here any longer. Get you gone, and give place to better men; you are no longer a Parliament.' He then stamped his foot as a signal, and in poured soldiers to clear the House.

The army was the government, and Cromwell was the army, the embodiment of military power and prestige. He was not yet ready, however, for one-man rule in outward fact. He had schemes of his own to try. He and his council of officers quickly put temporary authority into the hands of a new Council of State with thirteen members, four of them civilians. All other civil authorities, of whatever degree, were desired to remain at their posts. This order included, of course, Milton and his colleagues who had worked for the preceding Council. Cromwell himself took the responsibility for issuing writs which summoned 139 carefully chosen persons to a new assembly, the army's substitution for the large and Rump-weighted body which had been proposed. Although these 139 persons theoretically represented various constituencies, both the representation and the representatives were determined by the Lord-General. The Little Parliament (or Barebones Parliament, as it was soon to be called) met, as summoned, on 4 July. One of its first acts was to elect a new Council of State of thirty-one members, including the short-lived Council of Thirteen. Again the blind Secretary for Foreign Languages was retained in office.[45]

We do not know Milton's immediate reactions to these momentous events. He was still waiting for the reply of Salmasius (who was rumoured dead in late December),[46] and he seems to have been little employed by the army's interim Council. In January he translated a routine letter to the Spanish ambassador, and early in February he prepared another to the authorities at Venice;[47] but the only state paper which can be traced to his hand in the period between February and October of 1653 is a letter of 2 July to the King of Denmark, expressing the English desire for more friendly relations.[48] Following the outbreak of war with the Dutch, the Danish ambassadors had left England, their country's interests causing them to side with Holland. But another great naval victory had been won by the English in June 1653, and Cromwell's Council of Thirteen, among the last of its official acts, had ordered a letter to be written to King Frederick of Denmark, encouraging a resumption of diplomatic negotiations. On 9 July the Council also listened to a letter which Milton had written to its President, Sir Gilbert Pickering, in reference to materials needed for work on Walton's Polyglot Bible.[49]

Milton himself, one month after the Council considered his letter to Pickering, turned again to the translation of Psalms into English verse. During the week of 8–14 August he produced translations of Psalms 2–8, having done Psalm 1 at another (probably earlier) time.[50] He attempted no more, however; and since there is no proof that his efforts were intended contributions to the complete translation of the Bible, our interest necessarily centres in the appeal of the eight psalms chosen.

Psalm 6 might have attracted Milton to this particular sequence:

Pity me, Lord, for I am much deject,
Am very weak and faint; heal and amend me,
For all my bones, that even with anguish ache,
Are troubled, yea my soul is troubled sore.
And Thou, O Lord, how long? Turn, Lord, restore
My soul . . .
                                        mine eye
Through grief consumes, is waxen old and dark
In the midst of all mine enemies that mark.

But in most of the others are the cry of human trouble and the sense of God's protection. Thinking of how his character had been defamed by Morus in the abusive *Clamor*, Milton might have found relief in translating Psalm 7, to which he dictated an explanatory note: 'Upon the words of Chush the Benjamite against him':

He digged a pit, and delved it deep,
And fell into the pit he made;
His mischief that due course doth keep
Turns on his head, and his ill trade
Of violence will undelayed
Fall on his crown with ruin steep.

Milton was now sensitive to his prominence in the public eye, and trusted that his interpretation of political events was not without divine guidance:

Lead me because of those
That do observe if I transgress;
Set Thy ways right before, where my step goes.

He knew, too, that his enemies were pointing to his blindness as God's punishment upon the regicide, and Psalm 3 was reassuring:

Lord, how many are my foes,
How many are those
That in arms against me rise;
Many are they
That of my life distrustfully thus say,
'No help for him in God there lies.'
But Thou, Lord, art my shield, my glory . . .
    Of many millions
The populous rout
I fear not, though encamping round about
They pitch against me their pavilions.

Psalm 2 could have suggested to him the hostility of foreign powers to God's work as manifested recently in England:

          the kings of the earth upstand
With power, and princes in their congregations
Lay deep their plots together through each land
Against the Lord . . .

With his translation of Psalm 8 he stopped:

> When I behold Thy heavens, Thy fingers' art,
> The moon and stars which Thou so bright hast set
> In the pure firmament, then saith my heart,
> O what is man that Thou rememberest yet? . . .

This could have brought scant consolation to the poet, who never more was to behold God's handiwork.

Unlike the psalm translations of 1648, which were all in the common service metre, Milton's exercises in August 1653 contain a great variety of rime and metrical patterns, which may, in part, represent an experiment to discover if a blind man can compose verses more difficult and ambitious than sonnets. On the other hand, the strangely anarchic rhythms remind one somewhat of *Samson Agonistes*, to which Milton may have returned earlier in this period. It would be hardly surprising if he did. He had not only suffered the blow of total darkness; his health was bad, his spirit was low. Discouraged at times no doubt, and often miserable, he knew how Samson felt, eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves. He may have written of the Hebrew's blindness before, but he could write better now. There had not yet been time enough to adjust himself to his affliction; or, at least, there had not yet been an occasion to prove himself superior to it.[51]

The occasion came eventually, as it came also to Samson. But there are passages in the tragedy which cry with acute awareness of horror:

> O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
> Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
> Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
> Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,
> And all her various objects of delight
> Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased,
> Inferior to the vilest now become
> Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me;
> They creep, yet *see*. I dark in light exposed
> To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
> Within doors, or without, still as a fool
> In power of others, never in my own;
> Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day! [67–82]

In simple truth we cannot tell when this and Samson's other great speeches on blindness were written. But we may suspect that they have about them the eloquence and conviction of newly met reality. The agony of Samson's words on blindness is the agony of Psalm 6, which Milton translated, we know, on 13 August 1653. Those words have the ring of raw experience—something very different from the controlled report on distress overcome, such as we find later in the sonnet to Cyriack Skinner, or even in 'When I consider how my light is spent'.

The foregoing remarks, let candour add, are quite subjective and liable to critical blindness, for poetry can be fearfully and wonderfully made. Still, the biographer finds it noteworthy that Milton turned again to the writing of verse in 1652–3, when his affliction was new; and in addition to eight psalms and two sonnets which we know he composed, he may have written further dialogue or monody for an unfinished *Samson Agonistes*. No other literary design, not even *Paradise Lost*, could have had more relevance for him in this period of personal crisis. Samson's plight was more than ever his own plight. If Milton, too, could achieve fortitude, could find renewed strength, could glimpse with sightless eyes God's final use of him, all might yet be well. The working out of the drama was, in a sense, the working out of his own problem.

Perhaps a draft of the tragedy was completed before September 1653. In any case, the surviving manuscript of Milton's minor poems—not including *Samson*—contains evidence that it was being prepared for a second edition about the year 1653.[52] However, no second edition appeared. What stopped Milton could have been his sudden realization that, if he included *Samson Agonistes*, readers would almost certainly have identified him with the over-strong Hebrew who was punished with blindness for his sin. What stopped him could also have been a new turn of events, as we shall see.

Samson's depression, before he was challenged to new and final service, resulted from a conviction of utter helplessness:

> Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,
> To what can I be useful, wherein serve
> My nation, and the work from Heaven imposed,
> But to sit idle on the household hearth,
> A burdenous drone, to visitants a gaze
> Or pitied object . . .? [563–8]

Milton, we know, one year after blindness became total, proudly informed Bradshaw that he found 'no encumbrance' to the performance of his proper duties. On the other hand, he was forced to accept the Council's opinion that another person was needed. His usefulness was limited; the fact had to be faced. The thought of Salmasius helped him, no doubt, to face it. Limited usefulness was potentially glorious in character. There was something to be done that he alone could do. His name might yet be greater than that of Salmasius if he could emerge triumphant from a contest in which the two were really pitted against each other. Salmasius had rebuked a nation; Milton had rebuked Salmasius; and now, when Salmasius addressed himself directly to Milton, the whole world would applaud a successful rejoinder. He thought himself equal to this test, though blind. He had confidence in his own scholarship, and his health was gradually improving. Next time he would overwhelm his antagonist. If only the moment would come!

On 24 August/3 September 1653 Salmasius died. Soon it became evident that the much-discussed, long-awaited *Responsio* would not be published. Two and a half years Milton had waited, only to be disappointed at last.[53]

Cheated by death of a decisive encounter with the great man, he reacted swiftly. He would still compose a *Defensio Secunda*. Monsieur Morus and his unendurable *Clamor* awaited their punishment. Had not the Council ordered him to stifle the *Clamor*? A suitable answer would not only vindicate his own reputation in the eyes of Europe; it would publish his mature judgements on men and events, providing a record for the ages. (Deprived of combat with the giant Harapha, Samson seized the next opportunity that came his way, resolved to make it something memorable.)

The *Clamor* was, of course, an anonymous work, as the *Defensio Regia* of Salmasius had originally been; but there had been no doubt in anyone's mind concerning the authorship of either book. Every person with whom Milton talked, every correspondent abroad in a position to know the facts, agreed that Morus was the writer of the *Clamor*.[54] Even so, before the year 1653 ended, Milton may have wondered for a moment about the reliability of his informants. An occasion for wonder was the appearance of a little book entitled *Polemica, sive Supplementum ad Apologiam Anonymam pro Rege et Populo Anglicano adversus Jo. Miltoni Defensionem Populi Anglicani, &c.* ('Polemica, or a supplement to the anonymous Apology for the King and People of England against John Milton's Defence, &c.'). Here again was the author of the 1651 *Apologia*, thought to be Dr. Bramhall, whom John Phillips had vigorously attacked with Milton's able assistance. In the *Polemica* the real author revealed himself to be an obscure English clergyman named John Rowland. He apologized for the bad Latin with which he had been charged, explaining that he was a poor man and that he lacked both grammar and dictionary. He would long since have corrected the attribution of his former book to the courtly and distinguished Bishop of Derry if the printers had not insisted that he bear the expense of a *Supplementum*.[55]

This was a disconcerting revelation. Milton was glad, no doubt, that the *Responsio* had been published under Phillips' name instead of his own. Nevertheless, he set to work on his new book confident in the assumption that Morus was the man to be demolished. He sought additional information on his opponent. Gossip and fact about the misdeeds of the luckless Frenchman poured into Milton's ear, and it seemed to him that the gossip was no worse than the facts. He was dealing, clearly, with a palpable reprobate, a Priapus-priest, and he would say so in his answer, mincing no words. The *Clamor* had been scurrilous and abusive, but Milton proposed to teach its author what he most earnestly believed, that only people who live in glass houses have any moral right to throw stones. 'No one but the blameless either dares or has the authority openly and fearlessly to accuse.'[56]

The house of hindsight, whose windows open only on the past, is notorious for its scornful laughter. We know now that Milton was after the wrong man, that Alexander Morus was not the real author of the *Clamor*. Secure in our knowledge, we can look back and see that the blind secretary accepted much gossip for truth, believing what he wanted to believe. But we can look still further if we choose. We can remember that the English secret service was remarkably effective in Thurloe's day, that Milton's confidence in some of his informers was justifiably great, that in almost two years he heard nothing which cast doubt upon the authorship of Morus or suggested an alternative attribution. We can remember that Milton was by no means the only person to be deceived. We can remember that Morus, although not the writer of the *Clamor*, was nevertheless involved in its publication, and that detection of his minor role, not mere rumour, had resulted in his being saddled with the whole book.[57]

Milton was misinformed, and little wonder. The secret was so well kept that the true author lived, quite openly and safely, in England itself. He was an Anglican divine of French birth, Dr. Peter Du Moulin. Milton was almost certainly acquainted with his brother, Dr. Lewis Du Moulin, a well-known Independent and Commonwealth man, who had composed in 1650 a Latin translation of the first chapter of Milton's *Eikonoklastes*. Peter Du Moulin, although Royalist in his sympathies, and ejected from his rectory near York, chose not to flee to the Continent. After spending some time in Ireland, he settled at Oxford, and even received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University in 1656. He had sent the manuscript of the *Clamor* to Salmasius, who, for some reason, had turned it over to Morus. It was Morus, then, who actually delivered the book to the printer and who added a dedication to Charles II of his own composition. Morus was guilty of both deception and indiscretion in asking the printer, Vlacq, to sign the dedication. When this particular secret became known, it was only natural that men should consider him the author of the entire work.[58]

During the autumn and winter of 1653 the *Defensio Secunda* took shape in Milton's mind. As he listened again to the scurrilous *Clamor*, and began the laborious work of dictating a reply, he proposed to himself a nobler task than the mere punishment of two such obvious rascals as Morus and the printer Vlacq. He would celebrate and further justify the continuing successes of his countrymen. He would acknowledge with becoming gratitude the triumph of his own first *Defensio*. Returning to combat 'not utterly unknown, perhaps even not unwelcome' (14), he would at the same time answer the attacks upon his character and satisfy the curiosity of his vast audience by giving some account of himself. He could hardly avoid speaking of himself, but he decided to balance the autobiographical passages with elaborate praise of Cromwell and brief tributes to other leading Englishmen. Finally, he would close this Second Defence with solemn advice to both Cromwell and his fellow citizens. He had cause for anxiety concerning the future of the Commonwealth, and his unique position as literary champion of English liberties entitled him, he thought, to warn as well as to vindicate.[59]

The book which resulted from these intentions stands today as a great transitional work in Milton's development as an artist. Even apart from its fourteen pages of straightforward autobiography, it is a personal record of striking significance. It embodies a critical paradox which, rightly understood, becomes a key to its author's mind. In the *Defensio Secunda* Milton accepts both the fact of blindness and its painful corollary of limited usefulness, and while there is no questioning the genuineness of his fortitude, it is important to notice that he has based it to a large degree upon a questionable assumption. He derives comfort and strength by regarding the first *Defensio* as the literary climax, the crowning achievement, of his whole life. He insists upon this judgement, squeezing the last ounce of satisfaction from details of the book's reception and influence. He can endure his affliction because, in the last years when sight was granted him, he reached the very pinnacle of personal usefulness. On the other hand, the book in which these revelations are made is a vigorous performance, far more interesting to posterity than the earlier work which it so urgently recommends. The *Defensio Secunda* has verve and vitality and the implicit promise of greater writing to come. (The miraculous strength of Samson is returning, but God's champion is still struggling with the problem of his irreparable loss of sight.)

'It is not possible for me,' says Milton of the first *Defensio*, 'nor can it ever be my desire, to ascribe to myself anything greater or more glorious' (18). He is satisfied that he has created 'a monument which will not speedily perish' (252). He has discharged the great trust which was placed in him; he has aided freedom-loving people everywhere.

> I feel that I addressed myself in my former Defence, and that I shall again address myself in this, to all sittings and assemblies wherever men of the highest authority are to be found, wherever there are cities and nations. I imagine myself to have set out upon my travels and that I behold, as if on high, tracts beyond the seas, and wide-extended regions; that I behold countenances strange and numberless, and all, in sentiments of mind, my closest friends and neighbours. . . . Encompassed by such countless multitudes, it seems to me that from the Pillars of Hercules to the farthest borders of India—throughout this vast expanse—I am bringing back, bringing home to every nation, liberty, so long expelled, so long an exile; . . . that I am spreading abroad among the cities, the kingdoms, and nations, the restored culture of citizenship and freedom of life. [12–14]

All this, Milton adds, is not 'extravagant talking'; he must believe it true 'unless I should choose to discredit and utterly to disparage the estimates and opinions of hosts of intelligent readers on all sides, far from being devoted or under obligations to me' (14). It seems to him, therefore, that he was designed by God, even from his childhood, to celebrate deeds of valour and to defend truth by reason—'the only defence which is truly and properly human' (10). In the famous *Defensio* he fulfilled himself, not only as a pamphleteer, but also, he seems to think, as a poet:

> Just as the epic poet, if he adhere strictly to established rules, undertakes to embellish not the whole life of the hero whom he proposes to celebrate in song, but, usually, one particular action of his life—as, for example, that of Achilles at Troy, or the return of Ulysses, or the arrival of Aeneas in Italy—and leaves alone the rest, so likewise will it suffice for my duty and excuse that I have at least embellished *one* of the heroic actions of my countrymen. The rest I pass by, for who could do justice to all the great actions of an entire people? [252]

This is analogy only, but coming as it does at the very end of a book which allows no greater achievement than a thing already done, it has the force of confession (and concession). We may believe that, when he dictated these lines, Milton had given up, not only his design of writing a complete history of Britain, but also his old dream of writing an epic. Circumstance had provided him with a nobler theme than the long-abandoned Arthuriad, and although he had written in prose rather than poetry, in Latin rather than English, he had satisfied beyond all expectation the ambitions of his youth.

On the other hand, the passages about blindness in the *Defensio Secunda* reveal an uncertain man, half-resigned to a limited usefulness, half-hopeful of achievements beyond anything yet realized. Milton is not only eloquent, he is thoroughly convincing, when he writes of his spiritual triumph over physical affliction. 'To be blind is not miserable; to be unable to bear blindness, *that* is miserable' (62). He can endure what he knows might happen to any mortal being—what he knows has actually happened to eminent men before him. As a matter of fact, his own health has greatly improved (he has probably stopped taking any medicines!), and he insists that he is 'still active, still ready to advance among the foremost to the most arduous struggles for liberty' (74). Even if he now belongs among 'the afflicted, the sorrowful, and the weak' (72), his claim upon divine protection is so much the greater. He recalls hopefully 'those old poets, ancientest and wisest, whose calamity the gods are said to have recompensed with far more excelling gifts' (62). He can testify that his own blindness 'deprives things merely of their colour and surface, but takes not from the mind's contemplation whatever is real and permanent in them' (70). Blindness brings the blessing of 'an inward and far surpassing light.' He reports, with grateful appreciation, 'the more than ordinary civilities, attentions, and visits of friends' (72). Even the great ones of the Government 'show me favour and indulgence, as to one who has completed his services, and readily grant me exemption and retirement. They despoil me of no dignity; they deprive me of no public office I held before; they disparage not the benefit which may have accrued from that particular service.' Still, they realize—and Milton notes the fact without bitterness—'that they are now to confer their favours upon one who is become less useful' (74). Not useless, but 'less useful'. He goes no further in letting us know his plans, if, at this time, he had plans.

He writes at some length about his blindness because he realizes what Royalists, and perhaps others, are saying. Indeed, his own religion had caused him to consider seriously the awful possibility that blindness was a punishment. But it could not, in his case, be a punishment for writing the *Defensio*; God is truth, and God does not punish those who publish truth to human kind. Furthermore, Milton knows from history that blindness is not necessarily a punishment; he can name men (sinful Samson is not among those he cites) who lost their eyes but were famous for virtue and good works. As for himself:

> I call Thee, O God, searcher of the inmost spirit and of every thought, to witness that I am not conscious of any offence (though, to the limit of my power, I have often gravely examined myself on this point, visiting all the recesses of my heart) recently committed or long ago, the heinousness of which could have justly caused and called down this calamity upon me above others. . . . I call the same God to witness that I have written nothing which I was not persuaded at the time, and am still persuaded, was right and true and pleasing to God—and this without being moved by ambition, by money, or by glory, but solely by a sense of duty, of grace, and of devotion to my country. [66]

Innocent of any wrongdoing, he regards his blindness as an inevitable calamity, not as a chastising.

In the *Defensio Secunda* Milton wrote about himself at greater length and with greater explicitness than he had ever done before, or was ever to do again. He began by thanking God, not only that he was alive in an age of victory over political and religious tyranny, but also that he had not disappointed the friends of freedom when he had been chosen to defend their righteous cause. Confident of divine favour, he prayed God's help in another task, the vindication of himself and others against calumny. He explained the tardiness of this vindication; so long as the reply of Salmasius had been rumoured almost ready, he had 'thought it better to wait and reserve my strength for the more potent adversary. But with Salmasius I imagine my battling is now at a close' (20). The haughty scholar was gone, killed, some said, by Milton's sharp pen. Before he had died, his spirit broken and his reputation shattered, he had solicited the support of other authors, and the *Clamor* had come forth in his defence. His own answer, so long anticipated, might yet appear posthumously, but meanwhile all Europe (so Milton fancied) awaited a rebuttal to the mad charges of Morus. Chiefly for the sake of good men living abroad, who might suspect the lies and still feel shame on Milton's account, he had decided to present detailed and convincing evidence 'that I am not one who has ever disgraced fair words by foul deeds, or the language of a free man by the actions of a slave; and that my life, by God's help, has been ever far removed from all baseness and loose behaviour' (118). In thus commending his own integrity, he hoped that he would not give offence, and he begged readers to interpret his motives fairly. After all, if his life were as shameful as the falsehoods of Morus proclaimed, it would bring disgrace, not upon himself alone, but upon the people of England whose virtues he had defended, and also upon the praiseworthy and illustrious men whose virtues he meant to eulogize in this second Defence. An obligation to others, in addition to self-respect, demanded an essay in autobiography.

Milton devoted fourteen pages of his book to an account of his own life in its more public aspects.[60] The emphases of this now-famous narrative derived, of course, from the nature of the attack in the *Clamor*, and we simply delude ourselves if we forget that the autobiography is defensive, aimed at a particular audience and composed for a special purpose. Milton says nothing about his poetry, or his marriage, or his teaching, or his early dedication to the ministry. He stresses, instead, his blameless behaviour at the University and in Italy, his persistent devotion to polite learning, his social conscience and publications for the public good, his acceptability to both Englishmen and foreigners of rank and distinction. He gratefully acknowledges his father's role in his education, pictures himself as a gentleman of modest but independent means, and underlines the fact that he has never sought preferment or financial reward for any of his services to his country. Because he is concerned about his reputation abroad, he gives four pages to details of his travels on the Continent, naming names and emphasizing the cordiality of his reception in both France and Italy. He advertises his fearless Protestantism, and makes clear his abiding concern for 'the progress of real and substantial liberty, which is to be sought for, not from without, but within, and is to be obtained principally, not by fighting, but by the just regulation and proper conduct of life' (130). We are meant to infer that the writer is a cultured and high-principled man of letters, holding an emergency appointment as an official of the Government, but primarily interested in literary and scholarly pursuits.

The account is not dishonest. On the other hand, it is no more revealing than a self-portrait done in formal dress, and the light around the head is not a halo, but the happy illumination of hindsight. Looking back upon his early efforts at pamphleteering, Milton perceives a coherence and order in his writing which he likes to think were the result of planning:

> When the bishops . . . had at length fallen, and we were now at leisure, as far as they were concerned, I began to turn my thoughts to other subjects. . . . Reflecting, therefore, that there are in all three species of liberty without which it is scarcely possible to pass any life with comfort—namely, ecclesiastical, domestic or private, and civil liberty—that I had already written on the first species and saw the magistrate diligently employed about the third, I undertook the domestic, which remained. But as this also appeared to be threefold—namely, whether the affair of marriage was rightly managed, whether the education of children was properly conducted, and whether, lastly, we were to be allowed freedom of opinion—I explained my sentiments. [130]

When under attack, Milton was not divinely immune to rationalization, and there is something very human and understandable in this predated discovery of design, which (quite justifiably in the circumstances) omits all mention of Mary Powell, Samuel Hartlib, and the threat of censorship which provoked *Areopagitica*, and which, moreover, prompts him to rearrange slightly the actual order in which his pamphlets were composed. Milton was an artist; and when patterns emerge from the usual muddle of human motives, the artist recognizes what he must have been doing from the start. The account is not dishonest, but it is potentially misleading to the literal-minded student in both its incompleteness and its blurred chronology.

Elsewhere in the *Defensio Secunda* are scattered bits of autobiography, supplementing the formal account. We have already noticed the passages on blindness. Milton even describes his own physical appearance, replying to the wild charge in the *Clamor* that he was a person extremely 'lean, bloodless, and shrivelled':

> No one who has seen me has ever, to my knowledge, thought me ugly; whether handsome or not is a point I shall not determine. I acknowledge that I am not tall, but my stature may approach nearer the middle than the smaller size. . . . It is not true that I am lean beyond example; on the contrary, I possess such spirit and strength that, when my age and mode of life so inclined me, I was neither unskilled in handling my sword nor unpractised in its daily use. Armed with this weapon, as I usually was, I considered myself a match for anyone, even my superior in strength, and secure from any insult which one man could offer to another. Today I have the same spirit, the same strength; my eyes only are not the same; yet to external appearance they are as completely without injury, as clear and bright, without the semblance of a cloud, as the eyes of persons with perfect sight. . . . In my countenance there still remains a colour so very opposite to bloodless and pale that, though past forty [he was forty-five], there is scarcely anyone who would not think me younger by nearly ten years. It is equally untrue that either my body or my skin is shrivelled. In these particulars, were I guilty of any falsehood, I should deservedly expose myself to the ridicule of many thousands of my countrymen who know me personally, and even of foreigners not a few. [60–62]

Nothing in the *Clamor* excuses an outburst like this. Sensitivity aggravated by blindness, plus considerable vanity, prompts the writer to tell us so much about his person.

The *Defensio Secunda* is a proud, indignant, and generous book.[61] While it vigorously damns the unholy trinity—Salmasius, Morus, and Vlacq—it offers enthusiastic praise for ten times as many others: English leaders, foreign friends, learned men at home and abroad. It is a book rich in names, most of them mentioned with admiration or affection. It lauds the English army as 'not only the bravest of armies but also the most modest and religious. Other camps are usually distinguished for drunkenness, for indulgence in various lusts, for rapine, gambling, swearing, and perjury. In ours, the leisure which is allowed is spent in the search of truth, in diligent attention to Holy Scripture; nor is there anyone who thinks it more honourable to smite the foe than to instruct himself and others in the knowledge of divine things—more honourable to engage in the warfare of arms than in the warfare of the Gospel' (178). Despite this tribute to the army as a whole, Milton elsewhere makes it clear that 'the truth, after being defended by arms, should be alike defended by reason, the only defence which is truly and properly human' (10). He also makes it clear that he has learned to rely, not on the dubious virtue of a numerical majority, but rather on the known excellence of an enlightened few:

> There is nothing more agreeable to nature, nothing more just, nothing more useful or more for the interest of man, than that the less should yield to the greater—not number to number, but virtue to virtue, and counsel to counsel. Those who excel in prudence, in their experience in business, in industry and virtue, will, in my judgement, however few, prove to be the real majority, and will prevail more in the suffrages of mankind than any number, however large. . . . Times may often occur when a large majority of the citizens may be unprincipled, . . . but it will not less behoove good citizens to strive against them on that account, and to do bravely, more regardful of their duty than of the smallness of their number. [152–4, 176]

In the *Defensio Secunda* no fewer than fifteen such 'good citizens' of England are specifically named.

Milton even praises a queen, Christina of Sweden. He carefully explains, in several parts of his book, that he has written 'not a syllable against kings, but against the underminers and pests of kings, against tyrants only' (104). Because Christina recognized this fact and showed 'an evident inclination' (104) to favour the English *Defensio*, Milton could not omit an acknowledgement of her virtues 'without a heavy charge of ingratitude'. Indeed, he is highly elated over having found, 'in the remotest regions, an arbitress so illustrious, so impartial, and so favourable to me' (108). To him the Queen of the North is a kind of goddess, heavenly and serene; his eulogy of her is rhapsodic and uncritical. Christina outshines her father, Gustavus Adolphus, 'as much as wisdom exceeds strength, as much as the arts of peace surpass the stratagems of war' (106). She may abdicate her kingdom (as current news predicted), 'but that she, who has proved herself worthy of the empire, not of Sweden only but of the world, should divest herself of the queen, can never be in her power' (108). As a most generous patroness of men of letters, and a most diligent student of the liberal arts, had she not invited Salmasius to Sweden because of his pre-eminence as a scholar? Had she not been among the very first readers of Milton's *Defensio*, which so surprised her honoured guest? Had she not perceived the weakness of Salmasius's arguments, and, recognizing Milton's integrity and the superior truth of his position, had she not awarded the Englishman the palm? Such, at least, was the common opinion; and it was reported that Salmasius, feeling the contempt of the Swedes, soon after departed. Milton's gratitude toward Christina fills pages of his second Defence: 'How magnanimous, Augusta, how secure on all sides must you be, fortified as you are with a virtue and wisdom clearly divine! . . . In what honour, in what veneration, must you ever be held by me, when your exalted virtue and greatness of spirit, not only glorious to yourself but auspicious and fortunate for me, have freed me, as it respects other kings, from all suspicion and disgrace, and by this signal and immortal benefit have bound me to you for ever' (104). In the last such passage he reflects on how he would have expressed his thanks if he were younger, and were to write with the liberty of a poet! The prose is Petrarchan enough.[62]

Although the *Defensio Secunda* was intended as an official pronouncement (Milton insisting that it was composed at the request of his superiors), the praise of several individuals in its pages was extravagantly personal and courageously impolitic. Christina abdicated as Queen of Sweden in June of 1654—just as Milton's eulogy of her virtues was first published to the world. He must have known that the event was impending. Her rule had been unpopular; her reckless liberality, her neglect of affairs, had resulted in frequent threats of revolution; and she herself, not bothering to conceal her distaste for the crown, had announced her intention of abdicating. Nevertheless, feeling deeply indebted to her discernment, Milton threw diplomacy to the winds in acknowledging the fact.

He was even more courageous, and more impolitic, in praising the abilities of his old friend, John Bradshaw. The lawyer who had presided at the King's trial, and had served for four years as a leading spirit of the Council of State, was perhaps the most conspicuous opponent in all England of Cromwell's arbitrary assumption of power. On 20 April 1653, when Oliver had appeared before the Council and declared it at an end, it was Bradshaw who had risen in outraged dignity and replied, 'Sir, we have heard what you did at the House in the morning, and before many hours all England will hear it; but, sir, you are mistaken to think the

Parliament is dissolved, for no power under heaven can dissolve them but themselves. Therefore, take you notice of that!'[63]

With these brave words Bradshaw committed political suicide, and he continued Cromwell's enemy for the duration of the Protectorate. Nevertheless, when Milton came to the passage in the *Clamor* which branded his friend 'an obscure and insolent scoundrel', he devoted three pages of his *Defensio* to a glowing panegyric:

> Though your censure [Morus] is the highest praise, far be it from me to be so wanting to that pre-eminent personage at whom you are barking, and who is a friend of mine, of all others the most deserving of my reverence, as not to defend him from audacious tongues . . . At home he is, according to his means, hospitable and splendid—the most faithful of friends, and, in every change of fortune, the most to be relied on. No one sooner or more willingly discovers merit, wherever it is to be seen, or acts towards it with greater favour. . . . Among his political enemies, if any has happened to return to his right senses (which has been the case with many), no man has been more ready to forgive. But if the cause of the oppressed is to be openly defended, if the favour and power of the mighty is to be resisted, if the public ingratitude against any meritorious character is to be reproved, then, indeed, no one could find in this man any want of eloquence or of firmness; no one could even desire an advocate, or a friend, more able, more intrepid, or eloquent; for he has found one whom no threats can turn aside from rectitude, whom neither intimidation nor bribes can bend from his duty and virtuous purpose, can move from an unshaken steadiness of mind and of countenance. By these virtues he has made himself deservedly dear to most men, and not to be despised by his greatest enemies. [156–60]

Milton knew how to deserve, and honour, a friend.

The praise of Cromwell in the *Defensio Secunda* occupies more pages than the autobiographical account, and it is partly a tribute to the man, partly a justification of recent events. Milton permits himself to be pleased, but not misled, by the Royalist tendency to conjoin Cromwell and himself in infamy. Tracing the career of the great Protector, he includes (without significant comment) certain details which parallel his own, largely different, life-story: 'He grew up in the privacy of his own family, and until his age was quite mature and settled, which he also passed in private, he was chiefly known for his strict attendance upon the purer worship and for his integrity of life. He had cherished his confidence in God, he had nursed his great spirit in silence, for some extraordinary times' (212). Acknowledging that Cromwell's 'power was not less in council than in the arts of war' (220), Milton nevertheless emphasizes the General's military genius, as a key to his character:

> He was a soldier superlatively exercised in the knowledge of himself; he had either destroyed or reduced to his own control all enemies within his own nature —vain hopes, fears, desires. . . . There lived in him an energy either of spirit or of discipline, established not by military rules only, but by the rule of Christ and of His sanctity, so that he drew men to his camp, as to the best school both

> of military science and of religion and piety . . . Hence it is that no one ever raised for himself a larger or better disciplined army in shorter time, obedient in all things to the word of command, welcome to the citizens and beloved by them, to its enemies in arms terrible indeed, but when reduced to peaceful subjection, the objects of their admiration . . . [214–16]

Such was the commander who eventually became 'the man of greatest capacity and experience' (206) in the Commonwealth. It was inevitable that he should be blamed by malcontents in all factions at home, natural that he should be charged with crimes by enemies abroad; but in the fervour of sincere admiration Milton can say to him: 'While you, Cromwell, are in safety, he shows an insufficient confidence in God who has any fears for the prosperity of England, seeing, as he must, that God so manifestly favours you and in all things is your helper' (218). Milton accepts the concept of the indispensable man.

For the recent dissolution of Parliament, and the inauguration of a Protectorate, the explanation therefore is simple:

> Perceiving that delays [by Parliament] were artfully contrived, that everyone was more attentive to his private interest than to the interest of the public, that the people complained of disappointment in their expectations and circumvention by the power of a few, you put an end to their arbitrary authority, which they, though so often advised to it, had refused to do. A new Parliament is called; the privilege of voting is allowed only to those to whom it was proper to allow it; the elected meet, and then do nothing; having harassed one another for a while with their dissensions and altercations, and most of them convinced that they were unfit persons, unequal to undertakings of such magnitude, they dissolve themselves. Cromwell, we are deserted; you alone remain. The sovereign authority of the state is returned into your hands, and subsists only in you. [220–2]

Although the situation is critical, Milton is convinced

> that there is nothing in human society more pleasing to God or more agreeable to reason, nothing more just and useful in a state, than that the most worthy should possess the sovereign power. That you are such, Cromwell, . . . is acknowledged by all—you, who are the greatest and most glorious of our citizens, the director of the public councils, the commander of the bravest of armies, the Father of your country—for by this title do all good men hail you with spontaneous and heartfelt voice. Other titles, though merited by you, your actions know not, endure not; and those proud titles, deemed great in vulgar opinion, your actions deservedly dismiss. . . . You suffered yourself, for the public benefit, to assume something like a title, resembling most that of Father of your country; you suffered yourself not to be raised, but indeed to descend so many degrees from on high, and to be forced as it were into the ranks, despising the name of King for majesty far more majestic. . . . Go on therefore, Cromwell, in your wonted magnanimity; it fits you well. Your country's deliverer, the founder of our liberty, and at the same time its Protector, you can assume no other character more dignified or august; for your exploits have surpassed not merely those of kings, but even those which have been fabled of our heroes. [222–4]

If Cromwell but surrounds himself with worthy councillors, the future of English freedom is assured.

A new Council of State, with Milton again appointed as a clerical assistant, held its first meeting on 16 December 1653, the day of Cromwell's installation as Protector. In effect handpicked by Oliver himself, fifteen men had been designated in the formal Instrument of the Protectorate to hold office for the duration of the government, removable only on the ground of proven corruption. In the *Defensio Secunda* Milton named nine of these fifteen with evident approval: Major-General John Desborough, Lieutenant-General Charles Fleetwood, Major-General John Lambert, Henry Lawrence, Edward Mountagu, Sir Gilbert Pickering, Walter Strickland, William Sydenham, and Philip Sidney, Lord Lisle. The six councillors whom (for whatever reason) he omitted to mention were Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, Colonel Philip Jones, Richard Mayor, Francis Rous, Major-General Philip Skippon, and Sir Charles Wolseley. Since Milton ended this part of his book with a generous reference to 'numberless other citizens distinguished for their rare merits' (234), his omissions may be argued to be without particular significance. On the other hand, the entire account was part of a peroration of advice to Cromwell, the Instrument of the Protectorate allowed the appointment of six *additional* members to the Council before the meeting of the first Parliament, and Milton ventured to recommend three persons not yet (and never to be) appointed: Colonel Robert Overton, Major-General Edward Whalley, and Bulstrode Whitelocke.[64]

Milton's motives in naming these three names are difficult now to fathom. Like Bradshaw and eleven others, Whitelocke had served continuously on the Council of State from its inception in 1649 until its dissolution on 20 April 1653, only to be passed over by Cromwell when he chose his new Council under the Protectorate. Nevertheless, Milton mentions Whitelocke among the men already nominated by Cromwell as his advisers—a reference, possibly, to his appointment as ambassador to Sweden. It is significant, however, that both Whitelocke and Overton had openly opposed the Protectorate. When Cromwell dissolved the Long Parliament, he had attacked Whitelocke in his speech to the House; and seven months after the appearance of Milton's *Defensio Secunda*, Overton was arrested and sent to prison, charged with plotting a military insurrection against the government. It is doubtful that he was guilty, but it is certain that he had informed Cromwell, with prompt ingenuousness, of his dissatisfaction with the Protectorate. If Milton knew of this, his recommendation of Overton as a worthy councillor is even more audacious than his earlier praise of Bradshaw. Overton, like Bradshaw, he was proud to claim as a personal friend—'connected with me for these many years in a more than brotherly union, by similitude of studies and by the sweetness of your manners'. He celebrated in some detail Overton's military prowess.

Major-General Whalley, on the other hand, he merely linked with Desborough as leaders in 'the fiercest battles of the war'. Whalley had never been a councillor; his influence had been purely military; and it is puzzling to know why Milton included him in this list. General Fairfax, for example, he had praised earlier as a great soldier unconcerned with affairs of state, retired from public life, Milton believed, because of his health. Still, if the author of the *Defensio* meant what he plainly said, both Overton and Whalley were recommended to Cromwell among the 'accomplished men and chosen citizens' to whom he 'might properly commit the care of our liberty; indeed, it is not easy to say to whom it could more safely be committed'.[65]

In the midst of his panegyric of Cromwell, Milton had paused to warn the Protector to guard well the tradition of English freedom:

> Consider often how precious a thing you hold deposited with you, and by a parent how dear: liberty, commended and entrusted to your care by your country, who now expects and hopes to attain through you alone that which she expected before from the choicest men of the whole nation. . . . Suffer not that liberty, which you have gained with so many hardships, so many dangers, to be violated by yourself or in any way impaired by others. Indeed, without our freedom, you yourself cannot be free, for such is the order of nature that he who forcibly seizes upon the liberty of others is the first to lose his own . . . You have taken upon yourself by far the heaviest burden, which will try you thoroughly; it will search you through and through, and lay open your inmost soul. . . . to be desirous of leading the people from corrupt institutions to a better plan of life and discipline than they had before, . . . to despise all the blandishments of pleasure, to shun the pomp of wealth and of power—these are the arduous things, in comparison of which war is a play-game. These will drive against you like a mighty wind, and shake your steadiness; these require a man who is upheld by divine assistance . . . [224–8]

This solemn admonition was Milton's excuse for discussing the problem of finding good councillors. Having made his specific recommendations, naming twelve desirable advisers, he ventured to offer Cromwell the benefit of his own advice on various matters.

Church and State, he declared, should be kept separate, and the Church should be purified, all its power and wealth removed. As for law-making, 'there are often to be found in a state men who have a sort of diseased itching for the enaction of a multiplicity of laws, like that of versifiers for the making of a multitude of poems. But laws are commonly bad in proportion as they are numerous . . . You should retain only necessary laws, and should enact others, but not such as would bring the good and the bad under the same yoke, or such as, providing against the knavery of the unprincipled, should at the same time prohibit what to honest men should be free from all restraint' (236). On the subject of education Milton advised: 'I could wish you should make a better provision for the education and morals of youth than has yet been made, feeling it unjust that the teachable and unteachable, the diligent and the idle, should be maintained at the public charge, and reserving the rewards of the learned for those already proficient in learning, for those of proven merit' (236). Ten years after *Areopagitica* he was also still concerned about laws governing freedom of the press: 'It is my earnest wish that you would permit those inclined to freedom of inquiry to publish whatever they have to communicate at their own risk, without the private inquisition of any magisterial censor. Nothing could contribute so much to the growth of truth, nor would all knowledge be forever measured out to us by the bushel, bestowed at the good pleasure of the half-learned, depending upon their censure, their envy, their narrowmindedness, or their detection of superstition in others' (236–8). Finally, Milton begged Cromwell to ensure freedom of conscience, supporting 'those who think it just that, not their own sect or faction only, but all the citizens alike should enjoy the right to worship as they please' (238).

Having thus counselled the Protector, Milton closed his book with advice and warning for the English people. True liberty, he cautioned, is neither won nor lost by force of arms alone; it springs, instead, from piety, justice, and temperance, its deep and intimate root being in the virtuous mind. Men who lack this source of liberty will quickly lose, therefore, the outward freedoms gained in war. Unless avarice, ambition, luxury, and superstition are banished, tyranny will reign *within*—a tyranny worse than any to be found abroad or on the field of battle. If England is not victorious in the difficult arts of peace, her victories in war will have been to no purpose. National wealth, military power, and successful diplomacy are delusive grandeurs; in justice and freedom lies the true greatness of a state. Having thrust out the Royalists, if the people imitate the same vices and hunt after the same vanities, they will become, in effect, Royalists themselves, and they, too, will fall before the wrath of God. Not even Cromwell can save them if they are thus easily corrupted. They will elect unfit candidates to Parliament, flattered by feasting and drinking; they will entrust the Treasury to thieves or to such as had shamefully squandered their own substance; they will relinquish the management of public concerns to persons whom nobody would trust with private concerns. Milton damned, in particular, such political abuses as the appointment of relatives or friends as tax collectors or sequestrators in the provinces. Perhaps he remembered the unfortunate experiences of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Powell, when he denounced those men 'of worthless character and desperate fortunes who, from being the purchasers at their own auctions, amass immense sums of money, which they convert to their own use and thus defraud the public, plunder the provinces, enrich themselves, and from the beggary and meanness of yesterday suddenly emerge to opulence and pride' (246). Genuine liberty, which good men only can attain, is incompatible with such corruption. 'To be free is precisely the same thing as to be pious, wise, just and temperate, careful of one's own, abstinent from what is another's, and thence, in fine, magnanimous and brave' (248–50).

To be the opposite of these things is eventually to be a slave. It follows, therefore, that the nation 'which has been incapable of governing itself, and has delivered itself up to the thraldom of its own lusts, is delivered over against its will to other masters, and, whether it wishes or not, is compelled to serve. For this we have the sanction of law and of nature herself, since anyone lacking command of himself, anyone who through imbecility or mental derangement is unable to manage his own affairs properly, is not left at his own disposal, but like a ward is given up to the direction of another' (250). If England desires to continue free, she must begin by being wise, or repent without delay. If her last actions should prove inferior to her first, she will have only herself to blame. 'To whatever state things return' (252), Milton feels that he has discharged his trust in celebrating the glorious beginning and in pointing out the *conditions* of true liberty. He offers a grim prophecy of what posterity will say should his countrymen fail their great opportunity:

> The foundation was strongly laid, the beginning, nay more than the beginning, was excellent; but it will be inquired, not without a disturbed emotion, who raised the superstructure, who completed the fabric? To undertakings so grand, to virtues so noble, it will be a subject of grief that perseverance was wanting. It will be seen that the harvest of glory was abundant, that there were materials for the greatest operations, but that men were not to be found for the work—although there was one man who could give good counsel, who could exhort and encourage, who could adorn and celebrate in praises destined to endure forever the transcendent deeds and those who performed them. [254]

On this note of self-congratulation and anxiety the *Defensio Secunda* concludes.

In addition to the major themes sketched above, the book contains far more variety of subject-matter than a brief summary can suggest. Ridiculing the verses on Salmasius which appeared in the *Clamor*, Milton condemns all poets lacking in principles: 'True poets I love and reverence, and I read them often with delight. Besides, I know that most of them, if I pass them in review from the very first down to our own Buchanan, are the sworn foes of tyrants. But who can endure these pedlars of verse, a race of mortals than which nothing can be more foolish, vain, corrupt, or lying? They praise or blame without choice, without discrimination . . . as prompted by caprice, or inspired by the bottle, or by the hope of getting a little money, or by their own senseless fury' (76–78). Of true greatness, and the Salmasian claim to such a title, he has this to say: 'To grammarians and critics, whose highest praise consists either in editing the works of other men or in correcting the blunders of transcribers, we readily allow industry and linguistic ability, with the credit and rewards of a learning by no means to be despised; but we do not call them great. He alone deserves to be called great who either achieves great things himself, or teaches how they may be achieved, or describes with suitable dignity the great achievements of others. Those things only are great which either make our lives happy—or at least comfortable and agreeable as far as is consistent with honesty—or which lead to another and a happier life' (94–96).

Of success Milton now writes: 'A cause is neither proved to be good, nor shown to be bad, by success; we demand, not that our cause should be judged by the event, but the event by the cause' (184). There is further argument for regicide, further comment upon the Presbyterians and the Scots, further objection to foreigners (obviously corrupted) interfering in English affairs. Events leading up to the trial of King Charles are again reviewed, and various misinterpretations are refuted. Milton discusses a hundred topics in the course of answering the *Clamor*.

Of all these topics, only one interested the unhappy Frenchman who had helped to publish the *Clamor*. Alexander Morus made desperate attempts to halt Milton's attack, for he rightly guessed its nature and knew himself vulnerable. Having heard about the *Defensio Secunda* from Milton's friend, John Dury, he acted swiftly. Armed with assurances from ministers of Middleburg and Amsterdam that the true author of the *Clamor* was someone else, Dury was moved to write to Hartlib from The Hague on 14/24 April 1654 and from Amsterdam on 19/29 April.[66] Morus himself speeded a letter to William Nieuport, ambassador in London from the United Provinces, denying his authorship of the *Clamor* and begging Nieuport to use his utmost interest with Cromwell for the suppression of Milton's book. The ambassador promptly referred the matter to Secretary Thurloe and soon after, fearing that the Protector was too preoccupied to be concerned, asked two of Milton's good friends to intercede directly with the blind man.[67] Milton listened to the letter from Morus, and then listened while his two friends asked, both for themselves and for Nieuport, that he accept the word of Morus and either suppress his *Defensio* or modify it accordingly. When they had finished, he told them that their request was unreasonable—that Morus was obviously unworthy of such credit, and no usage argued that one should accept the word of an enemy when both common report and satisfactory investigation contradicted his word. Since the *Defensio Secunda* was already in print and about to be published, the most that he could promise Nieuport was that nothing indecorous, nothing prejudicial to the United Provinces, would appear from his pen. Thus rebuffed, the two messengers made their report; the ambassador attempted a second time to persuade Thurloe to go to Cromwell; but Thurloe apparently washed his hands of the affair. England's leaders were as unpredictable as the freakish snowstorm that had ushered in the month of May.[68]

The offending book was published on or slightly before 30 May 1654, one month after the formal conclusion of England's war with the Dutch.[69] Sadly, Nieuport wrote to Morus on 23 June, explaining what had happened and expressing his grief that Milton refused to show any moderation. Dreading the abuse about to descend upon him, Morus then snatched at a straw: he persuaded an Amsterdam bookseller to suppress copies of the *Defensio Secunda* until he could hastily prepare a vindication of himself.[70]

It is a matter of fact, easily determined, that not even one-tenth of Milton's volume is devoted to a personal attack upon Morus. Apart from scattered epithets and slurring allusions, Milton wastes only seven pages out of 173 (plus a brief, later passage containing some recent information) on the character and misdeeds of his opponent. He wants, it is obvious, to keep the Second Defence on a higher plane than a petty quarrel or a scandalous exposé. Nevertheless, he fails. By swallowing the gossip from abroad and regurgitating it with gusto, he succeeds in producing seven pages that command fascinated attention. Readers then, indeed readers thereafter, tended to focus upon the lurid parts, shocked or delighted by the verbal drubbing given Morus the corrupter of maid-servants, Morus the mass of impurity, Morus the goatherd pastor, Morus the lecher, the scoundrel, the perjurer. Milton charges his presumed antagonist with adultery in Geneva and fornication in Holland. He expresses horror at the very notion of a minister of the Gospel defiling the house of his host, yet tells the sordid tale of Morus and Pontia with tight-lipped satisfaction. According to Milton, the Clamor most familiar to this foul Frenchman, this maid-hunting miscreant, is the cry of women seduced. Even Salmasius, we are told, abominated Morus before his death. This man who dared to attack both the English Commonwealth and its appointed spokesman is exhibited, briefly and brutally, as the most corrupt of mortals.[71]

Concerning Vlacq, the money-minded printer at The Hague, who had published the scurrilous *Clamor*, Milton had little to say; in two pages of scorching comment he dismissed the fellow as a paltry rogue, an impudent and practised impostor. Vlacq, Morus, and Salmasius—an admirable set of tragedians indeed! 'Yet our cause', declared Milton, 'could hardly be expected to have different adversaries.' 'If anyone should think our refutation deficient in gravity, he should consider that we have not to do with a grave opponent, but with a herd of players, to which, while it was necessary to accommodate the nature of the refutation, we thought it proper to have in view not always what would be most suitable to decorum, but what would most suit them.' Thus he defended what he knew would be regarded by some readers as a serious lapse of taste.[72]

The *Defensio Secunda*, quite apart from being a strange mixture of stately tribute and studied abuse, is a pivotal document in Milton's personal and literary life. Completing it he proved to himself that a blind man, aided by amanuenses, is fully capable of sustained composition and public usefulness. Many possibilities, feared to be closed with loss of sight, once again lay open before him. After 30 May 1654 Milton could reconsider with cheerful confidence his former plans, even his ambition to produce an epic poem; and he could certainly face his official duties with new equanimity.

While the *Defensio Secunda* was in preparation, Milton had put aside various other matters, which he turned to soon after the book was published. One of these was the troublesome business of recovering from the prominent Cope family the loan of £150 he had made long ago to Sir John Cope, deceased. Sir John's widow had remarried; their eldest son, Sir Anthony, had only recently reached his majority; they had contended in courts of common law that there were insufficient funds with which to pay this small debt. Milton had no recourse except to sue them in Chancery, which, with his brother Christopher's help, he eventually did, on 16 June 1654. The Copes took until 21 October to file their joint answer. Milton then promptly filed exceptions. There was further delay; on 6 February 1655 Christopher protested the Copes's failure to respond. The court upheld his protest, but then took until 28 May to issue the necessary subpoena. On 18 June Lady Elizabeth Cope filed her additional answer. There is no point in following the case further; we do not know how it ended, although it dragged out at least as late as June 1659. The surviving records remind us, however, if we need reminding, that the blind poet had his reasons to lament the law's delay, and suffered his full share of the financial problems that plague ordinary men.[73]

They remind us also that Milton and his brother continued on friendly terms. It is difficult to follow Christopher's career in this period, but we know that he lived in Ipswich and practised law in London. In February 1654, for some reason, he sold the property in the parish of St. Martin, Ludgate, which he had inherited.[74] On 29 March 1656 his daughter Mary was baptized at St. Nicholas, Ipswich.[75] We get glimpses of him in the almost endless records of Mrs. Powell's petitions for relief,[76] as well as in lawsuits involving John Milton; in view of subsequent developments it is significant that he acted as counsel, not only for his brother, but also for Mrs. Powell and her son Richard,[77] who was himself called to the bar in 1653 and, like Christopher, belonged to the Inner Temple.[78] John had special reason to be grateful to Christopher in February 1654, when a Mrs. Elizabeth Ashworth brought suit against him, for he was then absorbed in the *Defensio Secunda* and a legal squabble was more than ordinarily distasteful. Mrs. Ashworth, who had a claim on the Wheatley properties which the courts had awarded Milton because of his loan to the elder Richard Powell, accused Milton of holding on to the properties after getting all his money back. Christopher prepared and presented his brother's lengthy answer on 22 February.[79] The case, like the one brought by Milton against the Copes, was to drag along in the courts for many years, the next step, not ordered until the following December, being the examination of witnesses for both sides.[80]

The preparation and dictation of the *Defensio Secunda* had occupied approximately eight months. It is more than a coincidence that there were no letters of state translated by Milton between 8 October 1653, when the Swiss Evangelical cantons were complimented and assured of England's desire for peaceful relations with the Dutch,[81] and 29 June 1654, when two cordial letters were sent to the Count of Oldenburg over Cromwell's signature.[82] On 17 October 1653 William Jessop and Philip Meadows had been appointed to assist Thurloe in the dispatch of the business of foreign affairs,[83] and presumably Milton had been released from routine work for an indefinite period. He was reappointed as Secretary on 3 November and again the following February.[84] When his book was finally published, late in the following May, he returned to his normal duties. Soon after he had translated the two letters to Oldenburg, it fell to his lot (early July) to prepare Cromwell's congratulations to King Charles Gustavus, successor to the throne of Sweden by the abdication of Queen Christina.[85] During the same month he also translated letters to King John of Portugal, upon the completion of a new treaty,[86] and to the Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, concerning a legal snarl.[87] On 4 September he helped to express Cromwell's pleasure at the appointment of a Spanish ambassador;[88] and in October he prepared letters to Bremen and to Sweden, declaring the Protector's regret that these two Protestant states were in conflict, and offering his services as a champion of peace among all Protestant peoples.[89]

Meanwhile there was personal correspondence to dictate and there were complimentary copies of the *Defensio Secunda* to distribute. Three copies, we know, were promptly sent to Andrew Marvell at Eton—one for Marvell himself, one for John Oxenbridge (with whom the young man was still living), and a third for Bradshaw, who was evidently in the vicinity. Milton enclosed a letter to Bradshaw which Marvell delivered along with the book. A day or so later, on 2 June 1654, Marvell wrote to assure the author that his commission had been executed. Expressing 'all acknowledgement and humility' for his own copy, he continued:

> I shall now study it, even to the getting of it by heart, esteeming it according to my poor judgement (which yet I wish it were so right in all things else) as the most compendious scale, for so much, to the height of the Roman eloquence. When I consider how equally it turns and rises, with so many figures, it seems to me a Trajan's Column, in whose winding ascent we see embossed the several monuments of your learned victories. And Salmasius and Morus make up as great a triumph as that of Decebalus, whom too, for aught I know, you shall have forced, as Trajan the other, to make themselves away out of a just desperation.

He closed by stating his 'affectionate curiosity to know what becomes of Colonel Overton's business', and his pleasure in learning that Cyriack Skinner 'is got near you, the happiness of which I at the same time congratulate to him and envy'. The tone of the letter is that of a disciple, anxious to please, grateful for attention, quick to admire.[90]

Another of Milton's correspondents was the German, Henry Oldenburg, agent for Bremen since the summer of 1653 (he had lived in England for some eight years at an earlier period). Oldenburg was a man of almost forty, well educated, devoted to scientific study, and unusually outspoken for a diplomat. Milton not only liked him; he held the foreigner's candour in some respect. No disciple, Oldenburg acknowledged the gift of a copy of the *Defensio Secunda* in a manner very different from Marvell's. He suggested that Milton was wasting his time and energy on matters of little consequence, and he urged the blind secretary to prepare himself for worthier labours. He praised Milton's learning and returned fulsome thanks for the book, but ventured, nevertheless, to criticize the method of the argument and to question the attribution of the *Clamor* to Morus.

To this letter Milton dictated a mild and cordial reply on 6 July 1654, apologizing for not answering an earlier letter ('some unexpected business' had interfered) and for not enclosing at least a note with his gift of the *Defensio*. After praising Oldenburg's command of correct, idiomatic English, he emphasized his gratitude for all sincere and friendly criticism. Still, the German's doubts about Morus were puzzling:

> Formerly, whenever we discussed the question, just after you had come over from Holland, you seemed to have no doubt whatever that Morus was the author; such was the general opinion in that country, you told me, and no other name was suggested. If you have since acquired any other information, I beg you to tell me of it. . . . It would not be difficult to persuade me to engage in other undertakings, though I doubt whether they would be nobler or more useful (for what human activity could be nobler or more useful than the vindication of liberty?), if only my health and my blindness (a greater affliction than old age) and most of all if the 'cries' of such impostors as this will permit me to do so. For mere idleness has never had any charm for me, and, furthermore, I most reluctantly took part in this unexpected contest with the enemies of liberty at a time when I was engrossed in far different and far more delightful occupations. At the same time I do not regret what I have done, since it was necessary, and I am far from thinking that I have wasted my time to no purpose, as you seem to suggest. But of this, more later. . . .[91]

It is a pity that our knowledge of this polite but bristling argument ends here, abruptly. We know only that the two men continued friends. It is not inconceivable that the 'more later' was a sonnet, beginning 'When I consider how my light is spent . . .'

Milton's correspondence with foreign admirers produced some revealing documents, but none more interesting, surely, than a letter of

28 September 1654, addressed to Leonard Philaras. This native of Athens, to whom Milton had first written in June 1652, visited England in September 1654 and, of course, called to pay his respects to the author of the two *Defensiones*. Devoted to Greek literature since his childhood, and already impressed by the symbolism of his relationship with Philaras (he had even mentioned the Athenian's approval in his recent book), Milton welcomed his admirer as 'a brother and an affectionate friend'. Philaras, in turn, awoke in the blind man an unexpected and exciting hope: his eyesight, he said, might yet be restored. In Paris there was a Dr. Thévenin, an eminent oculist, who was both a friend and a relative. Let Milton dictate a detailed account of his symptoms, and Philaras would take it to this great physician, who might be able to determine both the cause and cure of the disease. Listening to the proposal, and feeling that the help offered might be truly providential, Milton agreed, and on 28 September he carefully composed a letter, summarizing the circumstances and giving all the information desired. (I have used the information, naturally, in my previous comments upon his blindness.) He ended the communication in a cautious and philosophical strain:

> Even if your doctor is able to see a small ray of hope in this, I am nevertheless prepared and resigned to find my case incurable; and I often reflect that since many days of darkness are destined for every one, as the sage warns us, my own darkness has hitherto, by God's wonderful grace, been rendered easier to bear than the darkness of death, through the consolation of leisure and study, and the conversation and visits of my friends. And if indeed, as it is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God', why should not a man rest in the belief that sight depends, not upon the eyes alone, but upon the guidance and providence of God? Certainly while He cares and provides for me, as He does, taking me by the hand and leading me, I will cheerfully grant my eyes relief from their task, since so it has seemed good to Him. Whatever the outcome may be, I now bid you farewell, my dear Philaras, with as much courage and composure as if I had the eyes of Lynceus.[92]

Milton's caution was wise. We do not know what Dr. Thévenin said about his case or what Philaras finally reported; we know only that blindness continued, unrelieved by human help.

When Milton dictated this letter he was waiting to see if Morus dared to answer the *Defensio Secunda*. As a matter of fact, Morus had spent a most uncomfortable summer. A few contemporary records afford us glimpses of his unhappy and generally harassed state. On 23 June/3 July a newsletter from The Hague reported:

> They have had here two or three copies of Milton against the famous Professor Morus, who doth all what he can to suppress that book. Madame de Saumaise [Salmasius] hath a great many letters of the said Morus which she hath ordered to be printed, to render him so much the more ridiculous. He saith now that he is not the author of the preface of the *Clamor*, but we know very well the

> contrary. One Vlacq, a printer, is reprinting Milton's book, with an apology for himself; but Vlacq holds it for an honour to be reckoned on that side of Salmasius and Morus, and besides, the profit he will make of it is the chiefest reason. Morus doth all what he can to persuade him from printing of it.[93]

On 14/24 July a Hague correspondent wrote:

> Morus saith he dareth not answer, the time being changed, for if he spoke ill of the government of England, the magistrates of Amsterdam would turn him out. It is said that he hath bought all the 500 copies which Elzevir had received, thinking thereby to suppress the book; but Vlacq hath printed a great number of them.[94]

Such indecision as Morus may have felt was perhaps compounded by the following note, sent to him by someone in England on 7 August:

> Sir, At my arrival here I found Milton's book so public that I perceived it was impossible to suppress it. This man hath been told that you were not the author of the book which he refuted; to which he answered that he was at least assured that you had caused it to be imprinted, that you had writ the preface and, he believes, some of the verses that are in it, and that that is enough to justify him for setting upon you. He doth also add he is very angry that he did not know several things which he hath heard since, being far worse, as he says, than any he put forth in his book; but he doth reserve them for another if so be you answer this. I am very sorry for this quarrel, which will have a long sequence as I perceive, for after you have answered this, you may be sure he will reply with a more bloody one, for your adversary hath met with somebody here who hath told him strange stories of you.[95]

Despite these warnings, Morus finally started to compose an answer. It seems likely that the commercial aggressiveness of Vlacq was the deciding factor. This enterprising printer had early offered to publish anything Morus might write, along with a reprint of the *Defensio Secunda* itself; but in July, while Morus understandably hesitated, Vlacq had calmly brought out an edition of Milton's book for the European market.[96] This was too much, and so Morus moved from Amsterdam to The Hague, there to pen his reply and, at the same time, keep an eye on Vlacq. Even at The Hague misfortune plagued him. While he was in the midst of producing his *Fides Publica contra calumnias Joannis Miltoni, Scurræ* ('A Public Testimony in Reply to the Calumnies of John Milton, Buffoon'), and while Vlacq was busily putting the manuscript into type as it came to him, Morus suddenly found it necessary to take ship to France. His abrupt departure left his printer for some days uncertain; then, deciding that an unfinished reply was preferable to a reply too long delayed, Vlacq published the Milton–Morus controversy under one cover, adding a note which explained the circumstances and promised the sequel 'as soon as possible'.[97]

The book was probably read to Milton in October 1654. There seem to be no state letters of his translating between October and the following

April;[98] and we may believe that he spent much of these five months, which brought his forty-sixth birthday, preparing and dictating a *Defensio Pro Se*. Doubtless he was given the news from The Hague, as reported in a letter of intelligence dated 3/13 November:

> Morus is gone into France. It is believed that he hath a calling, *et quidem a* Castres, and that he will not return. For he sees that at Amsterdam they love well his renown and learning, but not his conversation, for they do not desire that he should come to visit the daughters of condition, as he was used to do. He promised Vlacq to finish his apology, but he went away without taking his leave of him, so that you see that Vlacq hath finished abrupt. The truth is, Morus durst not add the sentence against Pontia, for the charges are recompensed, and where there is payment of charges, that is to say that the action of Pontia is good, but that the proofs fail him. Yea, I believe that Morus was fain to purge himself upon oath, and the attestations of his life at Amsterdam and at The Hague, he could not get them to his fancy.[99]

Certainly Milton received letters about his adversary from personal correspondents such as Ezekiel Spanheim of Geneva (letter dated 14 October, but not received until nearly three months later). When he acknowledged Spanheim's kindness in writing, on 24 March 1655, he spoke of a 'constant occupation' which had delayed his own letter another three months, and promised to send a copy of the new *Defensio* as soon as it was published.[100] We know, too, that Milton was in close touch with that tireless letter-writer Samuel Hartlib, who told him anything relevant he heard about Morus. The itinerant John Dury, for example, had been endeavouring 'to learn that which might have been useful to Mr. Milton', and he asked Hartlib to 'tell him that here at Basel I find not that Mr. Morus has any other character than what in the Low Countries is given him by such as love him not'.[101]

The incomplete *Fides Publica* of Morus was an exasperating performance from Milton's point of view. Its theme was denial of everything. Its tone was righteous indignation. Morus, it proclaimed, had neither written the *Clamor* nor contributed anything to the writing of it, and Milton was a convicted liar, having known before his *Defensio Secunda* was published that Morus was innocent. Milton had allowed his book to appear because few pages would have remained if all the reproaches thrown at Morus had been deleted. The false attribution had originated in malicious rumour; hearing that Morus had many enemies and was involved in a lawsuit, Milton had been drawn to him as a victim. The real author of the *Clamor* was alive and well, known to Morus by name but not by face; he did not live among the Dutch. Milton was a vicious scandalmonger, a mean and worthless person who judged the morals of others by his own. Puffed up with self-importance, this self-styled Defender of the English had dared to lecture Cromwell under the guise of praising him—dictating laws, prescribing duties, suggesting councillors, and even threatening the

Protector. But the burden of his book had been his ferocious attack upon Morus, an exhibition of unbridled licence and lying obscenity. If he had examined any of the published work of Morus (a list of both published and unpublished works was given in the *Fides Publica*), he would have realized that he was after the wrong man. Morus had even been unaware of Milton's blindness until the *Defensio Secunda* appeared. If anything had occurred to him that might seem a taunt at such misfortune, he was referring only to the mind.

Sightless Milton, dependent upon others for his knowledge of an anxious and somewhat incoherent reply, overlooked the slip of the pen in this last remark. He noticed, however, a hundred other, less damaging inconsistencies. Most infuriating to him was the smug assumption that it was justifiable for foreigners like Salmasius and the anonymous author of the *Clamor* to spit venom on England, but shameful if a loyal Englishman, following orders from his superiors, defended his country with the same weapons of abuse. Obviously disturbed by the charge of using foul language and violating all the proprieties of civilized controversy, Milton insisted that 'when we blame the bad, we may be considered, in some sort, as praising the good' (222). Furthermore, the gravest authors 'have always believed that words naked and plain, uttered indignantly, are far different from obscenity—that they express, instead, the utmost vehemence of reproof' (108). Consider Piso, Sallust, Herodotus, Seneca, Suetonius, Plutarch, Erasmus, Thomas More; consider the Church Fathers, Clemens Alexandrinus, Arnobius, Lactantius, Eusebius; consider Moses himself, and Job, and Solomon. Only crass ignorance could deny that these men 'intermix on divers occasions words more than indelicate, and subjects abundantly gross, with matters of greater seriousness' (110). It was the opinion, moreover, 'of Plato and the Socratic philosophers that there was nothing more appropriate or more suitable to decorum than the intermixture, the sprinkling of wit on the gravest of subjects'. Milton had 'previously made these things plain—and now once again—to men of learning and intelligence' (176).[102]

Although he was personally satisfied that his language was warranted by classical example, he admitted, nevertheless, a sad feeling of anticlimax as he 'stooped again to this contention, necessary indeed, but in itself most ungrateful' (222). Like Scipio Africanus, he had descended to 'things of no note or lustre' (4). The argument was a worn shoe. He told himself that he was now alone in fighting the enemies of England. He told himself that he must not 'despise any condition or any office that may be allotted to me by God, however humble it may be, or however inferior to what I had enjoyed before' (6). He realized, however, that the great controversy which had begun with the *Defensio Regia* of Salmasius was now fizzling out in a dull exchange of name-calling and reiteration. Promising his readers to patch up something which they would not disdain, he hoped that they would pardon him if, 'as I was heretofore not wanting to the people and the Commonwealth, I shall now show that I am not wanting to myself' (8). He replied only because the lies of Morus brought a stain and suspicion to his own character which could not be endured in silence.

Having accused Morus of the authorship of the *Clamor*, Milton was unable to drop the argument. He admitted having prayed to God 'that no one, and above all no virtuous and enlightened person', might think that he, 'foolishly elated by uncertain rumours' (40), had accused his adversary falsely, or had wrongfully aspersed an innocent man with fabricated crimes. As a pledge of his sincerity he was willing to say this to Morus himself: 'If I cannot prove, if I cannot make it plain, either that you were the author of that notorious libel against us, or that you have given sufficient cause for being deservedly considered the author, I shall acknowledge myself vanquished by you in this cause, and shall retire ingloriously with shame and dishonour. I shall not even deprecate the imputation of any offence, be it imprudence, or rashness, or slander' (12). A fairer proposition than this would be difficult to imagine, although, to posterity, such strong talk may suggest the struggles of an incautious victim of quicksand. How does Milton defend his seemingly impossible case?

The case, notice, involves *alternatives* of proof: Morus is to be shown 'either the author of that hell-born *Clamor* or one to be justly considered as the author' (14). As evidence of the Frenchman's actual authorship of the whole work, Milton offers the universal and unanimous report to this effect over a period of two years, the solemn word of reputable persons abroad, and the fact that no other attribution had been made by anyone. Morus himself admitted having met (and denied) the report, even from friends. But his denial means nothing, of course; if he had *not* denied authorship, under the new Articles of Peace with the Dutch he would have been deported from Holland as an enemy of the English government. So much for the one alternative. 'I know not', says Milton, 'what clearer proof could be expected or required, especially in an affair which occurred at a great distance, with a person who is an enemy, and that enemy a foreigner covered with every kind of infamy' (28). However, for the sake of argument, he next assumes that Morus did not, after all, compose the *Clamor*. What then?

> I have discovered, not by report only but by indubitable testimony, that it was you who managed the publication of the whole libel called *Regii Sanguinis Clamor*, that you corrected the press, and that you wrote the epistle to Charles II which bears the name of Vlacq, either entirely or in conjunction with some associate. This is proved by too strong an evidence for you to deny or dismiss in any way —from the circumstance of your name, Alexander More, being found subscribed in some of the copies of that epistle, as attested by many eyewitnesses.... There

> are many persons who have heard you yourself confess to those who had asked the question, and even declare without solicitation, that the said letter was yours. . . . It was not, I assure you, from report alone, but partly from witnesses of the most sacred honour who, in my very presence and with an awful solemnity of manner, declared what I have just said, and partly from letters written either to others or to me [that I have received this information about you]. [32–36]

Since Morus both published the *Clamor* and contributed to its contents, he may, therefore (to return to Milton's alternatives of proof), 'be justly considered as the author'. In support of this contention, Milton quotes from the *Institutes* of Justinian and appeals to legal precedent 'among nearly all nations' (30).

Most of the *Defensio Pro Se* is devoted to sarcastic comment upon statements made by Morus and upon the testimonials printed in the *Fides Publica*. Milton laughs at the title of the reply: both the faith and the chastity of Morus are now, it seems, very public. The good minister's manservant has been talking, and new stories of misconduct are current. Milton describes with gusto a reported brawl between Morus and Pontia; he names the woman with whom Morus became involved at Geneva (Claudia Pelleta); he dares his pious-talking opponent either to return to the Swiss city or to take oath that he had never committed adultery. The Church should make an example of this miscreant—not conceal his crimes with vague and misleading testimonials. The *Fides Publica* had abruptly concluded with only a few of these testimonials, but Milton, anticipating a supplement, argues the questionable value of letters of recommendation begged from persons in no position to know about private vices.[103]

Vlacq, the publisher, offering the *Fides Publica* for sale together with a reprint of the *Defensio Secunda*, had also seen fit to introduce the quarrel with two prefatory epistles: a brief statement signed by a certain Rev. Dr. George Crantzius, and a longer statement signed by himself. Crantzius scores Milton's book as a deplorable example of the kind of indulgence in personalities which governments should suppress. He knew Morus and was willing to admit some of the Frenchman's faults, but Milton's accusations were unjust. Salmasius himself had exonerated Morus in the Pontia affair. Salmasius had shown him, incidentally, an English work by Milton which contained blasphemous views on divorce. He had seen, moreover, parts of the great man's posthumous reply, and Milton was a blackguard if Salmasius might be trusted. The testy Englishman had even attacked an innocent printer. Vlacq, bubbling with innocence, devoted his own preface to a summary of his role in the controversy and a lengthy, autobiographical defence of his professional integrity. Protesting his complete neutrality, he marvelled at Milton's ignorance of ordinary business methods and Milton's propensity for mistaken attributions. Had not the *Responsio* of John Phillips (superintended if not actually written by Milton) also attacked the wrong person? 'If Milton is acknowledged in his own country to be a good man, let him be glad of it; but I hear that many Englishmen who know him are of a different opinion.'[104]

Each of these gratuitous commentaries is answered in the *Defensio Pro Se.* Milton seizes upon the admission by Crantzius that Morus is haughty, quarrelsome, impatient, thoughtless, and loose-tongued. The Frenchman is 'bespotted instead of bedecked' by the strange eulogies of his friend, and Milton enjoys the ironic spectacle. He promises to write a good funeral oration if the posthumous reply of Salmasius ever appears. Crantzius, uninjured himself, has betrayed both malice and hypocrisy in this attempt to injure a stranger. If he would learn Milton's views on divorce and also discover the weighty precedent for such opinion, let him study the *Tetrachordon* and not be over-eager to vomit slander. As for Vlacq, who had appointed himself not only Milton's printer but also his answerer, Vlacq is a malevolent and mercenary scoundrel, inconsistent in argument, unimpressive as a self-styled mathematician, and dishonest as a tradesman. All persons with any curiosity about Milton's writings are warned that the Vlacq reprints are corrupt.[105]

There is not much else. The *Defensio Pro Se* is sadly lacking in the important argument of the first *Defensio* and the varied themes of the second. Milton praises the United Provinces and Geneva in two brief passages; he lauds liberty of speech as 'the clearest discovery and fruit of my past, and the least questionable aim of my future'; he affirms himself to be 'perfectly secure, whatever your hungry emigrants may mutter or prate about me' (162). Once more he declares: 'It is a singular favour of the Divinity towards me that I, above others, was singled out to defend the cause of liberty which had been maintained with such dauntless valour; and this favour I have acknowledged, nor can the time ever come when it will cease to be my duty to acknowledge it' (86). Apart from such statements of autobiographical interest, the book is singleminded, monotonous, and dull. It begins and it remains on the low level of a personal quarrel, despite all attempts to give it a wider significance.

Because both Crantzius and Morus had mentioned the divorce tract, Milton realized that his views on this subject were becoming of interest to foreigners. He was pleased, therefore, to receive a polite letter from Leo van Aitzema, dated 19/29 January 1655, confirming this interest and asking permission to publish a Dutch translation of the pamphlet. Aitzema wrote from The Hague, where he was currently agent for Hamburg and the Hanse Towns. When he had served in London in the same capacity, he had met Milton and had several times called upon him. Remembering these visits with gratitude for the diplomat's continued goodwill, Milton replied on 5 February. He informed Aitzema that he had published, not one, but three treatises on the subject of divorce, that the first had been once revised, and that for the present he had no additions or further revisions to request. Thanking the foreigner for his consideration, he hoped for an accurate translator and offered to send a copy of any of the pamphlets needed. He was sorry only that a Latin rather than a Dutch translation was not being planned, since bitter experience had taught him that common readers take unkindly to uncommon opinions.[106]

When Milton dictated this letter, he was still busy with the *Defensio Pro Se*. By April or thereabouts the rebuttal was ready for the press, but, knowing that Morus might soon issue his supplement containing additional testimonials, Milton decided to defer publication for a time. He waited, as a matter of fact, two months before the *Supplementum* finally appeared. Meanwhile, other business so absorbed his time and attention that the delay proved, not an irritation, but a blessing.[107]

During the spring of 1655 a tragic event shocked Protestant Europe. It drove Morus out of Milton's mind and spurred him to dictate one of the most forceful sonnets ever composed in English. On 25 January Immanuel, Duke of Savoy, had decreed that the Protestant Waldenses community living in the Piedmont must either become papists or leave within twenty days. The Waldenses resisted, and late in April suffered a terrible massacre. By the middle of May news of this religious persecution reached London, and Cromwell's Council determined at once to intervene. Milton, who was again available for such work, was ordered to translate a number of state letters for immediate dispatch. Very promptly he dictated official communications to the offending Duke of Savoy and the Catholic King and Cardinal of France,[108] as well as requests for political intervention addressed to Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, the United Provinces, and Transylvania.[109] These letters are still masterpieces of eloquence, and may owe much to Milton's literary talents. On the other hand, the horrible affair captured his unofficial imagination, and the feelings aroused in him by stories of torture, butchery, and cold-blooded murder were probably frustrated by the formal language of international diplomacy. He found personal relief in sharpening his anger on the grindstone of a rigid poetic form.

*On the Late Massacre in Piedmont* is in many ways the most extraordinary sonnet ever written. Generations of readers have felt its power, and it has been finely praised, but after looking through other sonnets, even by Milton, we return to it in wonder. The Italian sonnet usually seems a neat, compact little form, admirably suited for the lyric expression of love and grief and other familiar emotions in the ritual of living. It is a page in a poet's diary, a comfortable cell for solitary thoughts. Feeling can turn around in it but cannot take flight. For centuries men have politely lowered their voices within its narrow limits, knowing that they will be heard. Milton, however, stirred this once to lift his voice, learned something incredible about acoustics. Richness and resonance fill the small room of his sonnet, with the awesome sound of a great wave pounding against a wall. There is no strain, no overflowing, no suggestion of the wall breaking; but there is fierce and terrible beauty in the impact of surging emotion and unyielding form.

Milton's anger, aroused by atrocities, by man's inhumanity to man, was further heightened by his attitude toward the victims. The suffering Waldenses were not merely Protestants; their sect was ancient; indeed, as he had observed six years earlier in the *Eikonoklastes*:

> if we may believe what the papists themselves have written of these churches which they call Waldenses, I find it in a book written almost four hundred years since, and set forth in the Bohemian *History* [of Václav Hájek], that those churches in Piedmont have held the same doctrine and government since the time that Constantine with his mischievous donations poisoned Silvester and the whole Church. Others affirm they have so continued there since the Apostles, and Theodorus Belvederensis, in his relation of them, confesseth that those heresies (as he names them) were from the first times of Christianity in that place. [V. 230; Yale ed., III. 514]

When England herself had been pagan or Roman Catholic, still worshipping 'stocks and stones', these primitive Christians had kept God's truth alive. Now they were being persecuted by the hateful papists, and the poet, knowing that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, called fervently upon a God of wrath to punish and remember:

Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold—
Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not! In Thy book record their groans,
Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant: that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learned Thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

It is a prayer of indignation, the eloquence white-hot, the music an ominous roll.

It is possible, and profitable, to analyse the technique of this poem apart from the emotion which evoked it. There is no 'turn' at the conclusion of the octet; in fact there is no turn at all. Milton ignores the conventional thought development of the Italian sonnet; his meaning accumulates by musical sentences that march imperiously past rimes, past quatrains, past traditional division into octet and sestet. One hears the rimes, however; indeed, their sonorous open vowels, echoed subtly within the lines, add much to the grandeur of sound. Since *Lycidas*, Milton had not managed such effective tonal harmony; and even *Lycidas* has no passage to match the sheer power of this.[110]

We do not know the exact date for either the composition of the *Massacre in Piedmont* sonnet or the publication of the *Supplementum* of Morus; but the two events were certainly near in time, and Milton descended abruptly to the nether regions of controversial prose. During the early summer of 1655 he busily dictated forty-nine octavo pages of acid comment on the new testimonials and arguments advanced by his opponent. The *Supplementum*, printed by Vlacq from manuscript copy sent from France, merits no analysis here; and Milton's detailed reply is scarcely more deserving of attention. Morus had been naïve enough to make various admissions which his blind antagonist seized upon with fierce delight: that the enmity of Madame Salmasius had made her try to entangle him in an ill-omened marriage; that hostile rumour had been widespread apart from the accusations of Milton; that certain details of the Pontia affair could not be revealed. Milton points out, too, that some of the letters published by Morus are irrelevant, since they were written before the minister's misconduct was publicly known. There are additional arguments, and a few—a very few—incidental remarks of interest. 'It always seemed to me best', said Milton, 'to grow slowly, as it were by imperceptible degrees' (280). 'Beauty, harmony, and strength [*venustas, numerus atque nervus*]', he said in a later passage, 'distinguish the eloquent writer' (286). But the *Defensio Pro Se* on the whole is deficient in these very qualities, and when it was finally published, on or slightly before 8 August 1655, it contributed nothing to Milton's literary reputation.[111]

On 28 November, not two weeks before Milton celebrated his forty-seventh birthday, Thomas Young, his old friend and one-time tutor, died. With his passing one of the last human links with the poet's childhood disappeared. Stephen Marshall, another of the Smectymnuans, had died only nine days before Young, and on 23 November he was buried with great solemnity in the south aisle of Westminster Abbey. Young, however, was buried in his parish church at Stowmarket, whither he had retired after his refusal to take the Engagement in 1649. The prelatical opponent of these two men, Joseph Hall, outlived them both, not dying until 8 September 1656.[112] The English public had not been allowed to forget the controversy in which all three, and Milton, had figured more than a dozen years before. *Smectymnuus Redivivus: Being an Answer to a Book, entitled An Humble Remonstrance* had been published in 1654 along with a reissue, under a new, combining title page, of Milton's *Apology* and *Reason of Church Government*.[113] It is interesting that there were enough unsold copies of these two tracts to justify their reissue. But Milton's name now had considerably more drawing power than it had in 1642. In 1653 Humphrey Moseley was even offering copies of the privately printed letter to Hartlib *Of Education*,[114] and in 1656 Edward Farnham would be offering *The Works of Mr. John Milton concerning Divorce, digested into one Volume.*[115]

This does not mean that Milton's views on education and divorce were at last gaining influential converts, or even that violent reactions to the latter were subsiding. In 1655 James Howell elected to add an undated letter to the third edition of his *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ* in which he attacked the 'Noddy that writ a book of wifing': 'that opinion of a poor shallow-brained puppy who, upon any cause of disaffection, would have men to have a privilege to change their wives, or to repudiate them, deserves to be hissed at rather than confuted . . .'[116] Howell did not name the 'puppy'; there was no need to. Nor did Alexander Ross name names in the second edition of his *Pansebeia* (1655) when he observed: 'There are amongst us Divorcers, who hold that men may put away their wives upon small occasions.'[117] The writer of a burlesque book catalogue, much reprinted, pretended to offer for sale '*Christian Liberty*: Or the lawfulness of shifting sides and opinions as the Saints do wives, which if not for their turn do turn them off and take new ones.'[118] These men, like Henry Hammond, knew that readers would readily recall 'a plea for divorces' as 'the first open attempt' to introduce licence 'at the beginning of these licentious times'.[119] When Roger Williams wrote to Mrs. Anne Sadleir suggesting, 'I do also humbly wish that you may please to read over impartially Mr. Milton's answer to the King's Book', her reaction was: 'If I be not mistaken, that is he that has wrote a book of the lawfulness of divorce, and if report says true, he had at that time two or three wives living. This perhaps were good doctrine in New England, but it is most abominable in old England.'[120] Although her response is revealing, Mrs. Sadleir should have been better informed; she was Cyriack Skinner's aunt.

Milton had, of course, his admirers as well as detractors. There were a number of favourable allusions to *The Tenure of Kings* during this period;[121] William Lilly and others referred in passing to 'the learned Milton';[122] and a Hague correspondent of Thurloe observed (in French): 'You have in England a blind man named Milton, who has the reputation of being a good writer.'[123] The typical European attitude was perhaps summarized by Jean Nicholas de Parival: 'As war was made with the pike, so was it also with the pen. For Salmasius wrote a book in defence of the King of England, and a certain Englishman called Milton, who was not known before, and grew famous by entering the lists with this triumphant champion, most acutely and elegantly answered it.'[124] But to English Royalists like John Hacket it was 'a petty schoolboy scribbler that durst grapple in such a cause with the prince of the learned men of his age':

> What a venomous spirit is in that serpent Milton, that black-mouthed Zoilus, that blows his viper's breath upon those immortal devotions [*Eikon Basilike*] from the beginning to the end! This is he that wrote with all irreverence against

> the Fathers of our Church, and showed as little duty to his father that begat him; the same that wrote for the Pharisees that it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause, and against Christ for not allowing divorces; the same, O horrid! that defended the lawfulness of the greatest crime that ever was committed, to put our thrice-excellent King to death . . . Get thee behind me, Milton; thou savourest not the things that be of truth and loyalty, but of pride, bitterness, and falsehood. There will be a time, though such a Shimei . . . escape for a while, yet he, and the enemies of my lord the King, will fall into the hands of the Avenger of blood.[125]

What did the Council of State think of the employee who inspired such extreme reactions? It is a lamentable fact that not one of the many members of the Council during the whole decade that Milton served them has left us any word to clarify their attitude. All we have are official records, and these are sometimes mystifying. From 1 December 1652 until September 1658 all references to him—even notices of reappointment—are without any designation of title. On 17 April 1655, when the Council was undertaking a number of drastic economies, reducing, even eliminating salaries, Milton's salary was cut from about £288 to £150 a year—but, uniquely, was made payable for life.[126] No explanation was given; we are left to infer that his employers, while regarding his future usefulness as slight indeed, intended to reward his past services with a generous pension. If this is correct, it is little wonder that they felt so; he evidently translated no letters of state between October 1654 and April 1655. But what inferences are we to draw from the sequel? In May 1655, as we have seen, he provided magnificent translations of Cromwell's letters protesting the Piedmont massacre. Moreover, he drew no pension, and his salary was actually reduced to £200, not £150, a year. It seems likely that he protested against being made a pensioner, and requested regular employment, if only as one of the Latin secretaries under Thurloe. Like blind Samson in his poem, he had finally discovered the dignity of earning one's daily bread.

We may follow this pathetic labour further, making of it what we can. Although there had been a little more work connected with the Piedmont business in June and July of 1655,[127] when he was also dictating his answer to the *Supplementum* of Morus, for some reason he translated no letters of state for the Council or Cromwell during the months of August, September, October, and November, unless he had a hand (there is no evidence) in the Latin translation of the important manifesto against Spain which was published soon after 26 October.[128] After November, however, we know that he was again employed with regularity. In December he translated some routine letters to Venice and France.[129] In January 1656 he prepared letters to the Swiss cantons and to Louis XIV,[130] and in early February a congratulatory letter of state to Sweden.[131] There was no further work in March unless, perhaps, it was another letter to the

Duke of Savoy.[132] Then the situation suddenly changed. On 19 February Philip Meadows had been relieved of his labours as one of the Latin secretaries and was nominated as a special agent to Portugal. For some time after his departure on this mission, his co-worker carried an extra load of translation. During April, for example, while the new treaty with Sweden was being negotiated, Count Christiern Bonde, the irritable Swedish ambassador, asked that the articles be put into Latin for his inspection, and then waited two whole weeks for Milton to prepare a suitable version. The ambassador was angry when he learned that none but a blind man was available for putting such a document into Latin, and that a mere amanuensis was privy to the treaty as a result of having to read it aloud to the translator. 'The employment of Mr. Milton was excused to him, because several other servants of the Council, fit for that employment, were then absent'; but Count Bonde continued indignant, and Bulstrode Whitelocke made a note of his complaints on 6 May.[133] Besides his work on the Swedish treaty, Milton had also translated during April official letters to the United Provinces,[134] to the King of Sweden,[135] to both Cardinal Mazarin and Louis XIV of France.[136] Indeed, during the remainder of the year 1656 there was not a month in which he did not translate one or more state letters for the Council or for Cromwell.[137]

Although these activities were occasionally time-consuming (as when the Swedish business was added to routine labours), Milton found himself enjoying, in general, a good deal of leisure for private study and composition.[138] Aided by amanuenses, he began to work once more at some of the literary and scholarly projects which had interested him before his entrance into public life. He returned, for example, to his *History of Britain*, four chapters of which he had almost completed by the time of his appointment as Secretary for Foreign Languages. He had reached, it may be remembered, a depressing point in his narrative, with England ruined by 'the general ignorance and decay of learning, . . . their neglect of breeding up youth in the Scriptures, . . . altars defiled with perjuries, cloisters violated with adulteries, the land polluted with blood of their princes, civil dissensions among the people, and, finally, all the same vices which Gildas alleged of old to have ruined the Britons' (x. 196). Milton had seen those same vices leading his country to destruction in 1648; and now, living under the dictatorship of Cromwell, he resumed his story with the reign of good King Ecbert: 'The sum of things in this island or the best part therefore,' he began the fifth chapter, 'reduced now under the power of one man, and him one of the worthiest . . . men might with some reason have expected from such union peace and plenty, greatness, and the flourishing of all estates and degrees. But far the contrary fell out soon after . . .' (197). The new chapter dealt with the period of the Danish invasions, and it was, perforce, an almost unrelieved recital of battles, more battles, pillage, famine, conspiracies, and acts of violence.

Listening carefully while amanuenses read to him from Asser, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Sir Roger Twysden's recent edition of *Historiæ Anglicanæ Scriptores X* (1652), and other books, then reviewing and organizing the salient facts in his mind, Milton dictated a continuation of his *History*. The structure of the fifth chapter was simpler and more obvious than that of the early part of the work: it consisted of a long prefatory paragraph followed by twelve sections, each under the name of a reigning king. The blind author was, however, even more critical than before in his comparisons and analyses of available sources. He also complained bitterly of 'the bad expression of these writers' (201); and the *Saxon Chronicle* in particular seemed to deliver its meaning 'darkly' (210), often 'without coherence of sense or story' (218). Milton was irritated and baffled when the *Chronicle*, everywhere 'ill-gifted with utterance' (220), became poetical in its account of the battle of Brunanburh. He would try, he promised, to reduce such 'extravagant fancies' to 'usual language' (233). Hearing a certain name turn up often and confusingly in the old chronicle of Huntingdon, Milton mentioned the fact and added: 'of whom we gladly would have been rid' (240). He spoke with admiration of such kings as Ecbert, Æthelwulf, Alfred, Athelstan, and Edgar. Æthelwulf, like others, had journeyed to Rome, but 'so much manhood he had as to return thence no monk' (203). Alfred, 'the mirror of princes' (223), had 'thirsted after all liberal knowledge', had 'permitted none unlearned to bear office either in court or commonwealth', and had shown himself commendably 'frugal of two precious things in man's life, his time and his revenue' (221–2). In earlier chapters Milton had written with disgust of women in warfare, but mentioning now the martial prowess of Queen Elfled, he noted her 'virtues more than female' (236). One of his sources deplored the malignant influence of Saxon rudeness, Danish drunkenness, and Flemish daintiness and softness; but 'these vices', said Milton, 'are as naturally homebred here as in any of those countries' (243). He concluded his fifth chapter with several picturesque stories about King Edgar, who died in his thirty-second year, 'before the age wherein wisdom can in others attain to any ripeness. However, with him died all the Saxon glory. From henceforth', noted the historian, 'nothing is to be heard of but their decline and ruin' (248).

The sixth chapter continued the narrative down to the time of the battle of Hastings and the Norman conquest. It consisted of eight sections, each under the name of a king. Comets, a bloody cloud over all England, 'strange fluxes upon men and murrain upon cattle' (253) were, in the harsh story, preludes to famine, fire, massacres, wars, and tiresome examples of violence and treachery. Once again Milton grew weary of his self-imposed labour. His historians, 'if they deserve that name' (286), differed greatly. Once again he was forced to tell of invading Danes, and he found it 'an endless work to relate how they wallowed up and down to every particular place, and to repeat as oft what devastations they wrought, what desolations left behind them' (255). Battles followed battles, but Milton knew that 'true fortitude glories not in the feats of war, as they are such, but as they serve to end war soonest by a victorious peace' (299–300). The British could not repel the Danes and win a victorious peace, for 'soldiers most commonly are as their commanders, without much odds of valour in one nation or other, only as they are more or less wisely disciplined and conducted' (255). The blind historian was cynical even in reporting the commendable actions of kings in this period: 'so good an actor is ambition' (307), he concluded of one king's deeds. 'It is a fond conceit in many great ones, and pernicious in the end, to cease from no violence till they have attained the utmost of their ambitions and desires; then to think God appeased by their seeking to bribe Him with a share, however large, of their ill-gotten spoils; and then, lastly, to grow zealous of doing right, when they have no longer need to do wrong' (280). As for clergymen, the period boasted perhaps one good bishop, Dunstan—the best 'of many ages', Milton conceded, 'if he busied not himself too much in secular affairs' (253).

Milton retold the famous story of King Canute and the sea:

> He caused his royal seat to be set on the shore while the tide was coming in, and with all the state that royalty could put into his countenance said thus to the sea: 'Thou, sea, belongst to me, and the land whereon I sit is mine, nor hath anyone, unpunished, resisted my commands. I charge thee come no further upon my land, neither presume to wet the feet of thy sovran lord.' But the sea, as before, came rolling on, and without reverence both wet and dashed him. Whereat the King, quickly rising, wished all about him to behold and consider the weak and frivolous power of a king, and that none indeed deserved the name of a king but He whose eternal laws both heaven, earth, and sea obey.

'A truth so evident of itself,' added the tired historian dryly, 'that unless to shame his court flatterers, who would not else be convinced, Canute needed not to have gone wet-shod home.' It was a 'laborious demonstration', and only its sequel seemed important: 'from that time forth he never would wear a crown, esteeming earthly royalty contemptible and vain' (281). There was more story interest in the old account of Elmer, a monk of Malmesbury, who tried to fly like a bird, but unfortunately forgot to provide himself with a tail. 'This story, though seeming otherwise too light in the midst of a sad narration, yet for the strangeness thereof' (308) Milton thought worthy the retelling. It had no moral, but it offered relief after endless wars and monotonous reports of men who 'died by sickness or Saracens' (297).

The moral of British history was, however, plain enough to Milton. After describing the battle of Hastings, he concluded that the English 'had fitted themselves for this servitude'. 'The meaner sort' were drunken and vicious; the clergy 'had lost all good literature and religion'; 'the great men, given to gluttony and dissolute life', had 'made a prey of the common people'.

> Whence it came to pass that, carried on with fury and rashness more than any true fortitude or skill of war, they gave to William their conqueror so easy a conquest. Not but that some few of all sorts were much better among them; but such was the generality. *And as the long suffering of God permits bad men to enjoy prosperous days with the good, so His severity oft times exempts not good men from their share in evil times with the bad.* [315–16; the italics Milton's]

Here the sixth chapter ended, and here the blind author decided to use his time and energy in other, more interesting and rewarding literary pursuits. Once again he put the manuscript aside, intending perhaps (but perhaps not) to complete the work eventually, although almost six hundred years of British history remained to be reviewed, absorbed, interpreted, and retold.

As the year 1655 drew to a close, Milton's study contained a clutter of unfinished or unpublished literary and scholarly projects. Besides the history of Britain there were the beginnings of an Arthuriad, probably an incomplete tragedy on Samson, fragments of a drama on 'Paradise Lost', a completed but unprinted history of Moscovia, and the manuscripts of many short poems. As relics of his adventures in pedagogy there were a manuscript Latin grammar and a manuscript handbook of logic. For years, as a by-product of his wide reading in classic poetry and prose, he had also been collecting materials for both a Latin and a Greek thesaurus. By 1656 his 'Thesaurus Linguae Latinae', designed as an emendation of Stephanus, had assumed considerable proportions, but it was far from complete.[139] Incomplete too was his 'Perfect System of Divinity', compiled (with the aid of his pupils in the middle 1640's) from the writings of learned divines.

For the blind man it was a time of difficult decision. The unhappy controversy with Salmasius and Morus was past; England had been two years under Cromwell's benevolent dictatorship, and republican dreams had melted in the powerful sunlight of expediency; except for routine labours of translation, Milton's political usefulness to his country was apparently at an end. Was it now too late to achieve his high ambitions as a poet? Was his one greatest talent lodged with him unserviceable? This question, and a memorable answer to it, he now (or perhaps earlier) put into a sonnet—destined to become the best known of all his sonnets.[140] For the answer, with unintended irony, contradicts itself. Indeed, the Piedmont massacre poem had earlier contradicted it; as Milton's first direct expression of deep personal emotion since *I did but prompt* of ten years before, it had proved his capacity for composing great verse unhampered by blindness. Clearly the experience gave him confidence in his mastery of this poetic form, because, in the following autumn and winter, he turned to the sonnet again and again for the utterance of intimate feeling. Moreover, the verses produced in this burst of sonneteering exhibit Milton, however doubtful and disillusioned, in the full flowering of his artistic maturity. He had yet to convince himself, but he was nearly ready for the epic adventure.

*When I consider how my light is spent* has often been read, mistakenly, as a sonnet *On His Blindness*—a title supplied first by Newton in 1752. Although its author was blind when he wrote it, its subject is not primarily blindness. The sonnet is actually a dramatic rejection, or qualification, of the parable of the talents; and a more accurate title for it (if a title be needed when Milton supplied none) would be 'On serving God, or his neglected poetic faculty'. Milton complains, not of blindness, but of his own misuse of time, of his own failure to employ fully his God-given powers as a poet. He postponed his prime effort; he allowed himself to be diverted by patriotism. Fearing Divine anger at such delays, he finally concludes that God cares less about man's use of talents than about man's patience, and fortitude, and readiness for service. Milton's words might have been written, with no alterations, by a poet in full possession of his eyesight but with some awareness of the Scriptural (and poetic) meanings of the terms 'light' and 'dark'. We must not permit our biographical knowledge to blind us to the sonnet's plain statements.

The key to the meaning of the poem is provided by Milton's conspicuous use of the parable of the talents (Matthew xxv. 14–30). This familiar story had long been charged with special significance for him. In his letter to an unknown friend written *c.* 1633, having been admonished 'that the day with me is at hand wherein Christ commands all to labour while there is light', he had replied that he was following 'that command in the Gospel set out by the terrible seizing of him that hid the talent': 'This very consideration of that great commandment does not press forward as soon as may be to undergo, but keeps off with a sacred reverence and religious advisement how best to undergo, not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit; for those that were latest lost nothing when the master of the vineyard came to give each one his hire.' This determination to prepare himself thoroughly for the best employment of his talents explains the Hammersmith and Horton years of retirement and study. When finally he entered upon his career of pamphleteering, he had special reason to think of himself as a man of several talents, and he acknowledged in his *Reason of Church Government* that 'God even to a strictness requires the improvement of these His entrusted gifts . . . those few talents which God . . . had lent me.' Still concerned about his various 'gifts of God's imparting', he feared in *An Apology* 'lest at my certain account they be reckoned to me many rather than few'.[141]

A decade later, however, having observed the changes in England and in himself, Milton had changed his mind about both the number of his talents and the nature of God's intentions. He identifies himself in his sonnet, not with the servant who was given five talents, not even with the servant who was given two (which might have stood for skill at both poetry and pamphleteering), but rather with the servant who was given only one talent and thereupon hid it in the earth. This neglectful servant, it will be remembered, eventually earned his master's reproof of 'wicked and slothful' and was cast 'into outer darkness'—a coincidence hardly lost upon blind Milton, who had hitherto translated such poignant symbolism in various Psalms.

The poet, having devoted his energies to prose for many years, fears that he had neglected his single true talent, and now dreads the day of reckoning:

> When I consider how my light is spent
> Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
> And that one talent which is death to hide
> Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
> To serve therewith my Maker and present
> My true account, lest He, returning, chide . . .

'That one talent' can hardly mean mere ability to write in prose or verse, nor can it mean ability to serve one's country. Milton had been doing both: he had composed at least two sonnets almost as soon as blindness had become total, and he had later dictated two *Defensiones* against Morus. 'That one talent' must have seemed to him his long-felt, God-given capacity for composing a truly great poem—a capacity which, in the analogy of the parable, might have been taken from him as punishment for his failure to use it. Foolishly he had passed by the day 'wherein Christ commands all to labour while there is light'; and now his 'one talent' is lodged with him 'useless'—or so, in his momentary depression, it appears. It is 'useless' because his 'light is spent', and his predicament prompts a foolish question:

> 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'
> I fondly ask.

This murmur, or complaint, is fond because it puts human logic before God's infinite wisdom.

Since Milton was not only a blind man but also a Christian and a poet, 'light' in this sonnet does not mean one thing and one thing only. It doubtless means, by extension, 'sight', the power of perceiving light; but it also means, as many passages in his other poems prove, divine inspiration, the light from above so necessary to his art. God is the supreme Poet (in Greek the 'Maker'). It is quite possible that the sonnet followed some abortive attempt to begin an epic, when the *History of Britain* was put aside; it was almost certainly a product of some discouraging experience, something which caused Milton to reflect on the connexion between a talent apparently 'useless' and 'light' unquestionably 'spent'. Had he been cast 'into outer darkness' because he, too, was an 'unprofitable servant'? Had 'inward light', which (as the Chorus in *Samson Agonistes* says) 'puts forth no visual beam', disappeared with the external light of physical vision? And if so, what did God now expect of him?

That the primary meaning of the word 'light' in this sonnet is not eyesight, but Milton's 'inward light' or poetic faculty, is suggested not only by the emphasis on the 'one talent' but also by the provocative phrasing of the second line: 'Ere half my days in this dark world and wide'. The world was 'dark' because of his blindness and because of his lack of 'light'; but what of the time reference? In December 1655 Milton became forty-seven, and if he literally or even vaguely considered this less than 'half my days', he must have expected to live a century—a most unlikely supposition. His own father had lived to be eighty-four, which was double the poet's age in 1651, when total blindness came. He had reached exactly half of the biblical threescore years and ten in 1644, when he was only first aware of his sight growing weak in one eye. It seems probable, therefore, that he traced the exhaustion of his poetic 'light' to the beginning of his pamphleteering, back in 1641.

In the fourth and fifth lines of the sonnet Milton says that his soul is now 'more bent' to serve his Maker with his 'one talent'. He is not *still* wanting to write a great poem; his spirit is more strongly inclined to do so than ever before. The explanation lies, probably, in his state of mind after the composition of his last *Defensio* in 1655; he would naturally feel most like reproaching himself for his pamphleteering and consequent neglect of his poetic plans in a time of spiritual deflation and 'let-down' immediately following the completion of a long and arduous job. Moreover, the controversy with Morus had been as bitter and distasteful as his earlier attempt to reform the laws governing divorce. In 1645 he had said *finis* to prose controversy by publishing his *Poems*. Exactly ten years later he may well have ended another period of noisy and furious argument with 'soul more bent' than ever to receive the healing grace of immortal verse. The sickening anticlimax of the Salmasius–Morus quarrel was accentuated, of course, by the added distress of blindness.

Was the Maker's gift of verse still to be put to its intended use, now that his light was 'spent'? The answer to this question is the most remarkable and least ambiguous part of the sonnet: it is a flat rejection of the whole point of the parable of the talents. There is, Milton now realized, one thing more important than 'that great commandment', one thing more important than making good use of divine gifts:

> But Patience, to prevent
> That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need
> Either man's work or His own gifts. Who best
> Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best.'

In his own tragic need for patience Milton found strength by discarding his long-held conviction of God's plan for him, and by adjusting himself to a new and humbler conception of service. God did not demand a return of his talent; God asked only a spirit of submission and fortitude, a spirit of patient endurance. Blindness was a 'mild yoke' which might easily have been heavier. On the other hand, he was not expected to give up all hope of being used further:

> His state
> Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed
> And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
> They also serve who only stand and wait.

He need not sit in despair; he should 'stand' ready for the divine bidding, 'wait' for the illumination from above. In true service, or waiting, the readiness is all.

Can we doubt that in the autumn of 1655 Milton needed patience, which he elsewhere called 'the exercise of saints, the trial of their fortitude'? He needed also a new dedication of his vast abilities, a new conception of his 'true account'. Ahead of him lay almost four years free from controversy, but he was not able to read the future clearly. He lacked the conviction which Samson's father expressed of God's purpose:

> To use him further yet in some great service,
> Not to sit idle with so great a gift
> Useless, and thence ridiculous about him,
> And, since his strength with eyesight was not lost,
> God will restore him eyesight to his strength. [1499–1503]

Two stirring sonnets—this latest, and the one on the Piedmont massacre—were proof apparent that 'his strength with eyesight was not lost'; and soon, now, he was to receive divine illumination for still greater use of that strength. He had not long to stand and wait.

Meanwhile, he composed additional sonnets, eloquent with endurance, or luminous with freshly-gained serenity. They reveal to us a Milton grown mellow, kindly, sweet-tempered, and lovable. They remind us of the Milton that his earliest biographers described—the Milton we have been all too likely to forget. It was Aubrey who portrayed the poet as 'of a very cheerful humour . . . extremely pleasant in his conversation, and at dinner and supper'. It was the anonymous biographer who noted Milton's 'gentleness and humanity', his 'sweet and affable' nature, his patience, his generosity to friends. It was Toland who reported his graciousness of speech, his 'equal and cheerful temper'. It was Milton's own daughter, Deborah, who remembered her father as 'delightful company, the life of the conversation', a man of 'unaffected cheerfulness and civility'. Such was the person his contemporaries knew and marvelled at in his blindness and old age. Remembering the souring effect of affliction upon some personalities, we may be struck, too, by these testimonies to a superior spirit.

As he grew older, Milton was more and more attracted to the young, and he gathered about him a group of devoted disciples. One of these was Edward Lawrence, son of the Lord President of Cromwell's Council. The poet took delight in the companionship of this able young man, still in his early twenties but soon to be elected to the Parliament. A sonnet of invitation addressed to Lawrence gives us an unforgettable picture of the relationship between Milton and his youthful admirer.[142] In mid-winter, when 'the fields are dank and ways are mire', the blind man cannot take his customary afternoon walks. Time, which hangs heavily upon his hands, 'will run on smoother' if he has a pleasant companion; and he longs to 'waste a sullen day' sitting 'by the fire' and talking. In fact, so spendthrift is his winter mood that he is reminded of the lily and rose 'that neither sowed nor spun'. Will young Lawrence join him? As an added inducement he offers a simple meal, 'with wine', and with music afterwards. He does not deliberately waste all of his days in such pleasant idleness, but, with Cato, believes that

> He who of those delights can judge, and spare
> To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

He has discovered that there is wisdom in occasional relaxation.

In his *History of Britain* he had declared that unwillingness 'to be detained long with sad and sorrowful narrations' was 'excusable in a youth'. He was also persuaded that age deserved an occasional holiday from serious matters. Another of his youthful friends, as we have seen, was Cyriack Skinner, grandson of the famous lawyer, Sir Edward Coke. Skinner, a few years older than Lawrence, had once been the poet's pupil and was now living near his former master in Petty France, Westminster. As a frequent visitor in Milton's home, he also received one of these sonnets of cordial invitation and Horatian mood:

> Today deep thoughts resolve with me to drench
> In mirth, that after no repenting draws . . .

In Milton's own youth—as Charles Diodati well knew—his conscience had often prevented him from enjoying himself; he had felt guilty about wasted time. Now, at forty-six or forty-seven, he repented no simple pleasures, for they were God's gift to His poor and oppressed creatures. There was no harm in Skinner's forgetting mathematics, and Milton's forgetting international politics, for a short while:

> Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,
> And what the Swede intend, and what the French . . .

In a well-ordered life one should not only 'know toward solid good what leads the nearest way', but also realize that

> For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,
> And disapproves that care (though wise in show)
> That with superfluous burden loads the day
> And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

Will young Skinner join him, then, in 'a cheerful hour'?[143]

Skinner was among those who marvelled at the blind man's extraordinary patience. He evidently said as much one day, and Milton composed a sonnet to explain. It is a poem more social and at the same time more self-conscious than *When I consider how my light is spent.* The earlier sonnet was an expression of spiritual conflict, deeply personal in its imagery and feeling. There is no ambiguity in the later poem—rather, a dramatic report on a situation which has already been mastered and which has impressed a young admirer. Milton cannot resist playing up to Skinner's feelings, and with an artist's touch emphasizes the pathos of his own predicament by noting once more (what Skinner obviously knows) that there has been no change in his external appearance:

> Cyriack, this three years' day these eyes, though clear
> To outward view of blemish or of spot,
> Bereft of light their seeing have forgot,
> Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
> Of sun or moon or star throughout the year,
> Or man or woman.

In respect to what he has next to say, the poet dwells suspiciously long upon these details of his plight; but it is not difficult to forgive his humanity, flirting thus with self-pity. His words were plainly a reflection of Skinner's attitude. As for his own:

> Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
> Right onward.

He can be brief about it—even whimsical, with imagery borrowed from sailing. He asks no longer, 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?' He has found his course now; he has both 'heart' and hope. As for Skinner's question:

> What supports me, dost thou ask?
> The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
> In liberty's defence, my noble task,
> Of which all Europe rings from side to side.
> This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask
> Content though blind, had I no better Guide.

Again the dramatic touch, the playing up to admiration. The real answer is to be found in the last five words, which, though they have the emphasis of position, sound almost like an afterthought. Yet we know that the 'better guide' than the consciousness of having won fame as a defender of the Commonwealth is the Divine Pilot who is helping him to 'steer right onward', the Poet-Maker who has not deserted and will not desert him.[144]

Milton's final sonnet, *Methought I saw my late espousèd saint*, is undated, and to consider it at this point in his history is to indulge an unorthodox conjecture. On the other hand, to consider it at a later point would be to respect a conjecture which has little more than longevity to recommend it. The sonnet is clearly about a dream in which Milton sees his deceased wife, brought to him, as Hercules brought Alcestis in the tragedy of Euripides, back from the grave:

> Methought I saw my late espousèd saint
> Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
> Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
> Rescued from death by force, though pale and faint . . .

His late wife is now a 'saint' because she is a soul in heaven; the deceased Marchioness of Winchester had been described as a 'bright saint', a 'new welcome saint'. Leaving Alcestis, the poet returns to the account of

> Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint,
> Purification in the old law did save . . .

The syntax is difficult here, but if we pick up the verb (line 9) and rephrase the passage, the lines read: 'Mine came vested all in white, as one whom (washed from spot of child-bed taint) purification in the old law did save.' Mary Powell Milton had died three days after her third daughter was born, before there was time enough for her to be 'washed from spot of child-bed taint'. Was it she that her husband dreamed of as still alive, as one who had, in other words, survived to be purified as explained in Leviticus?

The poem continues with somewhat ambiguous description:

> And such as yet once more I trust to have
> Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint . . .

Blindness is, presumably, the 'restraint' which the poet hopes will be removed in heaven, where he can see his wife again. In the dream, however, the poet is not blind: 'Methought I saw', he begins; to his 'fancied sight' she appears. She is 'vested all in white, pure as her mind'. Nevertheless, in his dream she is veiled, as Alcestis was when she returned to her husband, Admetus.

> Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight
> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
> So clear, as in no face with more delight.

He could not see her face clearly, but could see only the virtue shining from it. In heaven he trusts to have 'full sight' of her 'once more'. The conclusion of the sonnet is as overpowering in its simplicity as the Piedmont massacre sonnet is overpowering in majesty of sound:

> But O! as to embrace me she inclined,
> I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

The last line, with its syntactical flurry of excitement, followed by a dreary march of monosyllables, contains perhaps the most affecting ten words in all of English poetry. Having dreamed one day of the wife he had twice lost, Milton composed a sonnet charged with reawakened love and sorrow.[145]

It was his last short poem, though he had many years yet to live. Did he feel that there was something final about it? Or was it soon after composing this sonnet that he developed his aversion to riming verse, to be expressed so vigorously later? We simply do not know. By curious coincidence, in far-off Devon and Brecknockshire, two other masters of lyric verse, also with many years to live, in this same period put away their pens for ever and busied themselves with other matters. But Milton was no Herrick or Henry Vaughan, nor was his poetic vein now interrupted once more by concern over public affairs. Indeed, at this point in his life he resigned himself 'to the wisdom and care of those who had the government', not finding, as he later explained, 'that either God or the public required more of me than my prayers for them that govern'.[146]

The entreaties of friends were something else. At some time in the period discussed in this chapter Milton agreed to tutor another young nobleman; he was Richard Jones, son of Lady Ranelagh, and the year was perhaps 1653, when Jones had turned twelve and when Milton had not yet embarked on the arduous composition of his two final *Defensiones*.[147] Whatever the date, the fact is significant: it proves that Lady Ranelagh had been pleased with the instruction given the young nephew she had brought to Milton a good many years earlier. But she was now entrusting her only son to a blind man, and one senses that she hoped the arrangement would be mutually advantageous; Richard could learn much while reading to, and writing for, such an extraordinary teacher. He had only to walk across St. James's Park from his home in Pall Mall to be at Milton's garden-gate. The relationship came to an end in or before 1656. In the spring of that year, Richard was at Oxford, and his new tutor-guardian, who may have been recommended to Lady Ranelagh by Milton, was the talented German diplomat, Henry Oldenburg. It is doubtful that Milton recommended they go to Oxford. When young Jones dutifully wrote to his former tutor, expressing his pleasure in the charm of his new surroundings, especially in the Bodleian Library (a touch obviously calculated to impress), Milton was unimpressed. Oxford was but a place, the

Bodleian but a storehouse, unless one studied hard and cultivated virtuous behaviour. (Knowing Milton, and knowing his mother—to whom he sent his letter for transmittal to Milton—Richard had anticipated this didactic lesson too.) However, answering the letter, his former tutor drove the point home, and advised the boy to obey his new counsellor, Oldenburg.[148]

Oldenburg himself enrolled as a student in the English university in June.[149] He had promised Milton a letter, and he wrote it as soon as possible after getting settled in Oxford, sending it by young Jones on one of the boy's visits back to London. His plans in this new kind of life for him were, he said, to devote himself to the contemplation of 'Nature and its Author' and to the service of his friends, and at Oxford there were some assiduous students of science as well as of the liberal arts. (He referred thus vaguely to a group of the men who, four years later, would be organizing the Royal Society.) Perhaps aware of Milton's prejudice about the place, he went on to say, at some length, that he had already found too many people more interested in arguing than in learning—a contentious, backbiting, self-centred lot of alleged philosophers and theologians. He concluded by calling Milton's attention to the work of a Jesuit missionary to China, Martin Martini, who promised to confirm Adamite and Mosaic chronology by the calendars of Chinese ancient history. (Milton, it is implied, had earlier revealed to Oldenburg an interest in Old Testament chronology.[150])

It is perhaps significant that about the time he received this friendly letter, Milton tardily presented to the Bodleian Library copies of his *Eikonoklastes* and *Tenure of Kings*—to join the *Defensio* and his earlier pamphlets (and poetry) sent long before to his friend John Rouse. He probably dispatched them by Edward Phillips, who on the same day, 11 June, presented the Library with two of his own recent books.[151] Edward had left Shrewsbury to live again in London, and was now embarked upon a career as a hack writer. It is likely that he visited Oxford to gather material for an English dictionary which he had in progress, if not for other projects as well. His brother John had earlier begun a career as a writer, of course, with his *Responsio* in defence of his uncle, written at the age of twenty, and in 1655 he had followed this with a long satirical poem, *A Satyr against Hypocrites*.[152] The latter, a coarse but clever piece of ridicule, aimed at Puritanism, may or may not have pleased Milton, but if the young man was, as seems possible, asserting his independence of the strict morality to which he had been long subjected, one of his next publications must have caused his uncle genuine concern. After bringing out a tract of anti-Spanish propaganda, dedicated to Cromwell and addressed 'To all true Englishmen',[153] he compiled for the same publisher, Nathaniel Brook, *Sportive Wit: The Muses' Merriment. A New Spring of Lusty Drollery, Jovial Fancies, and à la mode Lampoons on Some Heroic Persons of These Late Times*.[154] Duly registered on 17 March 1656, and published soon after, this work aroused official ire. On 22 April an investigation was ordered, and three days later John Phillips was ordered to be arrested and fined. Cromwell himself approved the burning of the offensive book.[155] We do not know whether or not Milton moved to intervene.

On 25 June he answered Oldenburg's letter, commenting briefly on its contents and sending greetings from Cyriack Skinner (perhaps his amanuensis of the moment). Again he spoke depreciatingly of Oxford. As for the promised revelations of the Jesuit Martini, he did not see that the Mosaic chronology needed any confirmation from Chinese annals. He congratulated Oldenburg on his ability to concentrate on 'sublime matters', and spoke of missing his company. He also apologized for his brevity; he was rather busy at the time.[156] He was still busy on 21 September when he answered another letter from young Jones, received during the summer. His former pupil would understand about the sudden requests for official translations that interrupted his leisure; they had several times in recent months prevented him from replying. But Lady Ranelagh had told him that she would be visiting her son before leaving the country with her two daughters on a journey to Ireland, and she had kindly offered to carry any message that Milton wished to send. The letter doubtless reflects the conversation with the boy's mother; it commends Richard's eloquent pledges to be virtuous, chides (with a pun) his admiration of mere military prowess, and advises: 'Learn now, early in life, to judge great examples, not by force and strength, but rather by justice and temperance.' There are friendly greetings for Henry Oldenburg. Richard will, of course, miss his mother while she is away. So will Milton, 'for to me also she has stood in the place of all kith and kin [*mihi omnium necessitudinum loco fuit*]'.[157]

Milton had been without a wife (and a son) for more than four years. Lady Ranelagh had been practically separated from her brutish, unappreciative husband for even longer, and young Richard was in effect fatherless. The meagre facts of this relationship are most tantalizing. Reading the teacher's letters to his former pupil (in Latin, of course), we are in danger of seeing only the didacticism—of ignoring the expressions of mutual affection, the amusing puns that salt the almost paternal counsel, the constant references to an anxious mother who is herself a model of excellence. Lady Ranelagh was an intimate friend, almost like a younger sister, to Milton. We have his fervent word for it in September 1656. Was she anything more? Did she, perhaps, walk with him in St. James's Park, and did he pour out his troubled heart to her? We shall probably never know. We do know that she was an intelligent woman, with a talent for interesting herself in the serious and scholarly affairs of men. Her gifted brothers adored her. We may well believe that Milton, in a brotherly sense, adored her too. She went to Ireland in October 1656, and remained there for several years.

Five days after writing to young Jones, on 26 September 1656, Milton was once more asked by a visiting foreigner to sign his name in an autograph album. It was a Swiss minister, John Zollikofer, who made the request, and Milton bravely tried; but he ran off the edge of the page before he finished scrawling his last name, and completed it about half an inch below. The motto he chose was one he had had an amanuensis write for him when, five years earlier, he had signed the album of another foreign guest—it was an adaptation of 2 Corinthians xx. 9: 'I am made perfect in weakness.' Pleased with his acquisition, Zollikofer later wrote on the page: 'The famous blind Milton put this here.'[158]

What he did not, could not, know is what I must next discuss. What 'weakness' could accomplish, coupled with Miltonic fortitude, had only begun to appear. His conscience clear, the blind man who had closed his mind to all political issues now turned it resolutely to a vast, new, scholarly and literary undertaking.

# 12. Christian Doctrine, 1656–1660

WEDNESDAY, 22 October 1656, was a market day, and some of the good housewives of London heard news which must have caused gossip. Mr. Milton, the blind secretary of Oliver's Council, was marrying a woman he had never seen. The agreement and intention of marriage was published, as the law now required, during three successive weeks, first on 22 October, then on the 27th, then on 3 November. Milton was a widower, with three small daughters; his first wife had been dead for more than four years. His bride-to-be was Miss Katherine Woodcock of the parish of St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury. They were married on Wednesday, 12 November, by Sir John Dethicke, alderman and one of the justices of the peace for the city of London.[1]

Katherine was the eldest of three daughters of Mrs. Elizabeth Woodcock of Hackney, a widow almost exactly the age of her new son-in-law. Katherine's father, William, remembered (on dubious evidence) as 'Captain' Woodcock, had been dead for more than a dozen years. Since his death, the widow and children had been supported by kindly relatives; they lived, for example, rent free in the house of their cousin, Sir Thomas Vyner, alderman of London and the first man to have been knighted by Cromwell. Another wealthy and considerate kinsman was William Humble. They had a maidservant who had been with them for years, and they apparently existed in middle-class sufficiency. The three daughters were devoted to their mother, who before her marriage was Elizabeth Sudbury. The youngest of the three, Honor, never married but remained with Mrs. Woodcock until the widow's death in 1673.[2]

We do not know how Milton met his second wife, or how long they had been acquainted. We do not know whether he courted her and thus won her consent, or whether some mutual friend, concerned about Katherine's security and Milton's comfort, suggested the union. We do not even know anything certain about Katherine's appearance or personality; she may or may not have been the subject of Milton's last sonnet. The poet was within a month of his forty-eighth birthday when he married her. She was twenty-eight.[3]

When she became mistress of the house in Petty France, she became also stepmother of three children. Anne was now ten, Mary eight, and

Deborah four and a half. The new Mrs. Milton had once had a younger sister named Mary, who had lived to be almost twenty before she died. Her death had taken place—it was an odd coincidence—back in 1652, the same year in which Milton had lost his own Mary. Katherine had then been a woman of twenty-four.[4]

The blind man had grown accustomed to his Petty France residence, and no move was attempted after the second marriage. Familiar surroundings and an orderly existence were highly desirable now, for, relieved of all duties to the Council except occasional bits of translation, he had embarked on more ambitious work than anything attempted in the days when he had enjoyed sight. If he could only complete his *De Doctrina Christiana*, and thus clarify fully and finally his beliefs in the nature of God and the nature of the Christian life, he would be ready for their long-promised poetical counterparts. In the period immediately following the three *Defensiones* there was new motivation to get the huge task accomplished at last: having contributed so notably to the cause of political freedom, Milton wanted to define the grounds of religious liberty, not only for himself as bard-to-be, but also for Christians of all nations. Such a work had to be composed, therefore, in Latin. Its poetical fruits, however, would respect his original resolutions, and be written in English for his own countrymen.[5]

From his youth onwards Milton had constantly studied the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues, and his memory was excellent. Even so, the task he had set himself was staggeringly difficult for a man dependent upon the eyes of others for actual writing and the checking of references. In one respect he surrendered to this difficulty: he did not attempt a piece of fluent, sustained composition. Arguing that each separate point of Christian doctrine should find its direct confirmation in Scripture, he limited his own words to what he considered a necessary minimum, and quoted the Bible at great length. As an aid to memory in such an exhaustive compilation, he divided the whole into exactly fifty chapters, each a unit in a carefully organized pattern. The pattern had two main parts, comprising the two aspects of Christian doctrine which are recognized in teaching but inseparable in practice: faith, or the knowledge of God, and love, or the worship of God in the exercise of good works. The first part, involving thirty-three chapters, Milton subdivided to give adequate attention to God's nature, God's internal efficiency as revealed in general decrees and in the special decree of predestination, and God's external efficiency as revealed in generation, creation, and the divine government of all things including man before and after the Fall. (*Here was the theology basic to any epic poem concerned with the Creation and Fall.*) The second part, involving seventeen chapters, he subdivided to treat of man's various duties, towards God, towards himself, and towards his neighbour. (*Here was possible material for another*, *shorter* *poem.*) With this scheme he set about reducing into one compact body the whole of Christian doctrine as dispersed throughout the Scriptures.[6]

The more Milton had read in times past, the more he had been disgusted by the usual methods of theological controversy, by the sophisms and scholastic quibbles, the evasions and hasty deductions, the specious refutations and palpable misconstructions. Particularly, his experience in combing Scripture for the true doctrine and discipline of divorce had taught him to be wary of 'orthodox' errors which were valued from deference to custom and the spirit of party, despite their lack of Biblical sanction. As he said later, 'I had not even read any of the works of "heretics", so called, when the mistakes of those who are reckoned for orthodox, and their incautious handling of Scripture, first taught me to agree with their opponents whenever those opponents agreed with Scripture' (14).[7] He had finally resolved, then, to compose his own methodical treatise of Christian doctrine, derived solely from the word of God, as a means of establishing his faith and assisting his memory. Certain that divine revelation provides the only grounds of faith, and that God has opened the way of eternal salvation only to the faith of the individual, Milton realized that his creed could not be safely trusted to the opinions of other men. The true Christian must 'prove all things'. If a painstaking and prayerful study of the Bible led to any unorthodox beliefs, then he would cherish his 'heresies', so firmly based, in preference to the untried 'truths' of orthodoxy. He hoped for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his undertaking, for he meant to assume nothing except the divine inspiration of Scripture. All else he would try to prove, beginning with the existence of God. [XIV. 4–8]

Fate, Milton reasoned, 'can be nothing but a divine decree emanating from some almighty power' who 'has imprinted upon the human mind so many unquestionable tokens of Himself, and so many traces of Him are apparent throughout nature, that no one in his right senses can remain ignorant of the truth. . . . Everything in the world, by the beauty of its order and the evidence of a determinate and beneficial purpose which pervades it, testifies that some supreme efficient Power must have pre-existed, by which the whole was ordained for a specific end.' God's existence is further proved by the verification of numberless predictions (as of the dispersion of the Jews) and by 'that feeling, whether we call it conscience or right reason, which even in the worst of characters is not wholly extinguished' (24–30). Although far transcending the powers of human thought and perception, God has partly revealed Himself through His works and through the Scriptures, and man should not aspire, with subtleties and vague cogitations, to know more than God has been pleased to reveal.[8]

> Our safest way is to form in our minds such a conception of God as shall correspond with His own delineation and representation of Himself in the sacred

> writings. . . . If God habitually assign to Himself the members and form of man, why should we be afraid of attributing to Him what He attributes to Himself, so long as what is imperfection and weakness when viewed in reference to ourselves be considered as most complete and excellent when imputed to God? . . . Those have acquired the truest apprehension of the nature of God who submit their understandings to His word, considering that He has accommodated His word to their understandings and has shown what He wishes their notion of the Deity should be. [34–36]

Although the divine nature cannot be defined, it can be described, for Scripture tells us that the one true God is essentially a spirit, without beginning or end, infinite, immutable, incorruptible, omnipresent, and omnipotent; that He does not exert His power in things that imply contradiction; that His omniscience knows the thoughts and actions of free agents yet unborn; that He is supremely pure and holy, gracious, faithful, just, and incomprehensible. [XIV. 24–60]

Turning to the subject of divine decrees, Milton found that 'God in His wisdom determined to create men and angels reasonable beings, and therefore free agents, foreseeing at the same time which way the bias of their will would incline in the exercise of their own uncontrolled liberty.' Still, 'nothing happens of necessity because God has foreseen it'; divine prescience is an intransitive action, incapable of error but exerting no influence. 'God foreknew that Adam would fall of his own free will; his fall was therefore certain, but not necessary; it proceeded from his own free will, which is incompatible with necessity' (82–86). As for God's wisdom in endowing men and angels with freedom of will, even a mortal can understand: 'if free will be not admitted, whatever worship or love we render to God is entirely vain and of no value' (138). In the beginning, Milton might have said, was God's loneliness and need of love; and love, by its very nature, cannot be compelled. [XIV. 62–88]

Foreseeing, then, 'that men would fall of their own volition, God in pity predestinated to eternal salvation, before the foundation of the world, all men who should believe and continue in the faith, thus manifesting the glory of His mercy, grace, and wisdom according to His purpose in Christ' (90), whose ultimate sacrifice for mankind was also foreknown. God further decreed that the freedom of will which men would lose in their fall should be at least partly restored. The decree of predestination, Milton found, referred to 'election' only, its ultimate purpose being the salvation of believers; the silence of Scripture proves that the decree did not include reprobation. Only those who repeatedly reject the offered grace are finally condemned to punishment. 'If there be no repentance, of what advantage is election? If there be repentance, of what injury is reprobation?' Every man is endowed, if not with an equal measure of grace, at least with a measure sufficient to secure salvation. 'That an equal portion of grace should not be extended to all is attributable to the supreme will of God alone; that there are none to whom He does not vouchsafe grace sufficient for their salvation is attributable to His justice' (146–8). 'The gift of reason has been implanted in all, by which they may of themselves resist bad desires, so that no one can complain of, or allege in excuse, the depravity of his own nature compared with that of others' (130). God's election, moreover, is not particular, but general—a decree, with a condition, covering the entire human race. [XIV. 90–174]

Considering next God's external efficiency as revealed in generation, Milton could find in neither Scripture nor reason any support for the orthodox, Athanasian concept of a tri-personal God. Driven to a 'heresy', he dictated a somewhat self-conscious preface to his chapter on the Son:

> If I were a member of the Church of Rome, which requires implicit obedience to its creed on all points of faith, I should have acquiesced from education or habit in its simple decree and authority, even though it denies that the doctrine of the Trinity, as now received, is capable of being proved from any passage of Scripture. . . . I see no reason why anyone who belongs to the same Protestant or Reformed church, and professes to acknowledge the same rule of faith as myself, should take offence at my freedom—particularly as I impose my authority on no one, but merely propose what I think more worthy of belief than the generally accepted creed. [176]

The Son of God is said to have been begotten in two senses: He was figuratively begotten at the time of His exaltation; but first He was literally begotten by generation, of God's own substance, when the Father, uncompelled by necessity, of His own free will begot His Son as the consequence of a decree. Hence the Son was born within the limits of time, and, unlike the Father, is not eternal; 'it is impossible to find a single text in all Scripture to prove the eternal generation of the Son' (180). He was, however, the first of all creation, existing in the beginning under the name of Logos, and by Him afterwards were all things in heaven and earth made. As for the Trinitarian concept: 'Scripture saith, and the Son saith, "I and my Father are one"; I acquiesce. Certain commentators conjecture that they are one in essence; I reject what is merely man's invention. For the Son has not left us to conjecture in what manner He is one with the Father (whatever member of the Church may have first arrogated to himself the merit of the discovery), but explains the doctrine most fully' (208). The Son testifies that whatever share of divinity He possesses is a gift of the Father, who is the one true, self-existent God.[9] [XIV. 176–356]

Applied to the subject of the Holy Spirit, however, Milton's methods of inquiry left him baffled:

> With regard to the nature of the Holy Spirit, in what manner it exists, or whence it arose, Scripture is silent, which is a caution to us not to be too hasty in our conclusions on the subject. . . . Since the Spirit is neither said to be generated nor created, nor is any other mode of existence specifically attributed to it in Scripture, we must be content to leave undetermined a point on which the

sacred writers have preserved so uniform a silence. . . . It seems exceedingly unreasonable, not to say dangerous, that in a matter of so much difficulty believers should be required to receive a doctrine, represented by its advocates as of primary importance and of undoubted certainty, on anything less than the clearest testimony of Scripture. [356–8, 378–80]

Unfortunately, in the Bible the term 'spirit' is used to refer to many things: sometimes the Holy Spirit, sometimes an angel, sometimes Christ, sometimes God or His power and virtue. But even in Scriptural references to the Holy Spirit, Milton could find no sanction for the divinity of a Third Person on the grounds that the name of God, divine attributes, divine works, and divine honours are attributed to the Spirit. Discovering no warrant to consider this mysterious Being as equal to and identical with God, Milton concluded that it 'was created or produced of the substance of God, not by a natural necessity, but by the free will of the Agent, probably before the foundations of the world were laid, but later than the Son, and far inferior to Him' (402). In any case, he felt certain that the Holy Spirit acts not of Himself or in His own name, but for the Father and Son, giving only what He receives from Them. In this capacity the Spirit aids men in the comprehension of spiritual things, interpreting the Gospel, guiding in prayer, and directing the exercise of Christian liberty. [XIV. 356–402]

Adhering to the testimony of Scripture, Milton concluded that the Holy Spirit played no part in the Creation, although the Son acted as a secondary agent, as the Word, working the will of the Father. The universe was made, Milton reasoned, out of formless, pre-existing matter, which was essentially good, since it proceeded first from God Himself, and which can never be finally annihilated, since God is both eternal and incorruptible. 'As to the actions of God before the foundation of the world, it would be the height of folly to inquire into them' (2), yet the creation of invisible things, Heaven and the angels, seems to have taken place before the apostasy and before the creation of visible things, the material universe. Man was formed in the image of God, with natural wisdom, holiness, and righteousness. Nevertheless, 'when God infused the breath of life into man, what man thereby received was not a portion of God's essence or a participation of the divine nature, but that measure of the divine virtue or influence which was commensurate to the capabilities of the recipient' (38). Adam's soul and body were given simultaneous existence in the act of creation, but human souls thereafter were 'not created daily by the immediate act of God, but propagated from father to son in a natural order' (42). [XV. 2–52]

God's providence, Milton asserted, is manifest in His government of the universe. He preserves both angels and men, not absolutely, but with reference to the conditions of His decree; and since the Fall, He preserves mankind only as regards their existence, not as regards their primitive perfection. Milton found that God governs even the voluntary actions of men, but concluded that such government does not infringe upon their free agency. 'God does not make that will evil which before was good, but the will being already in a state of perversion, He influences it in such a manner that out of its own wickedness it operates either good for others or punishment for itself, though unknowingly, and with the intent of producing a very different result' (72–74). Thus, although God cannot be considered the author of sin, His providence 'finds its exercise, not only in permitting its existence, or in withdrawing His grace, but also impelling sinners to the commission of sin, in hardening their hearts, and in blinding their understandings' (68). He tempts even the righteous, as in the cases of Abraham and Job, for the purpose of proving their faith or patience. After the Fall, God limited human life, and the allotted span has become more and more contracted with the passage of time. No man may exceed this span, although God Himself or human intemperance may shorten it. Beyond God's ordinary providence, 'whereby He upholds and preserves the immutable order of causes appointed by Him in the beginning' (92), Milton found an extraordinary providence, whereby God or someone empowered by God produces a miracle, or effect contrary to the usual order of nature, for the manifestation of divine power, or to confirm faith, or to increase the condemnation of unbelievers by removing all excuse for unbelief. [XV. 54–96]

In Scripture Milton saw much evidence of God's special government of angels. Like man in his original state, good angels are upheld, not by the grace of God, but by their own strength; and although they are ignorant of many things, they are gifted with excellent understanding and much is revealed to them. They are spirits, of ethereal nature, immortal, most powerful in strength, endued with the greatest swiftness—'which is figuratively denoted by the attribute of wings' (34). In number almost infinite, created in perfect holiness and righteousness (hence called Sons of God), they are distinguished one from another by offices and degrees and proper names. Their chief is Michael, who 'is introduced in the capacity of a hostile commander waging war with the prince of the devils, the armies on both sides being drawn out in battle array, and separating after dubious encounter' (104). The evil angels revolted of their own accord before the Fall of man, and although they cannot escape from their punishment in hell without God's permission, 'they are sometimes allowed to wander throughout the whole earth, the air, and heaven itself, to execute the judgements of God' (108). Their knowledge is still great but only increases their misery. They also have their leader and retain their respective ranks. The good angels not only stand about the throne of God, praising Him and executing His commands; 'it appears also probable that there are certain angels appointed to preside over nations, kingdoms, and particular districts' (102). [XV. 34–36, 96–110]

Of the special government of man before the Fall, Milton found the facts clear and reasonable:

> God, having placed man in the garden of Eden and furnished him with whatever was calculated to make life happy, commanded him, as a test of his obedience, to refrain from eating of the single tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, under penalty of death. . . . No works whatever were required of Adam; a particular act only was forbidden. It was necessary that something should be forbidden or commanded as a test of fidelity, and that an act in its own nature indifferent, in order that man's obedience might be thereby manifested. . . . It was called the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from the event, for since Adam tasted it, we not only know evil, but we know good only by means of evil. For it is by evil that virtue is chiefly exercised and shines with greater brightness. [112-14]

Marriage was instituted, if not commanded, at creation; 'it consisted in the mutual love, society, help, and comfort of the husband and the wife' (120). At its institution superior rights were reserved for the man, and this power was increased after the Fall. The purpose of marriage is the procreation of children or the relief and solace of life; it is an honourable institution, forbidden to no order of men, but commanded only to those who cannot live chastely otherwise. As 'an union of the most intimate nature', marriage 'ought not to be lightly dissolved' (154), but under certain conditions divorce should be allowed. Milton devoted a number of pages to developing this argument from Scripture once more. He now discovered, however, a new 'heresy' about marriage, which his method compelled him to state frankly: Scripture nowhere forbids polygamy, and in many passages seems to sanction it. [XV. 112-78]

Adam and Eve sinned at the instigation of the Devil, yet of their own volition, by disobeying God. When they sinned, all their posterity of course sinned in them, because 'it is a principle uniformly acted upon in divine proceedings, and recognized by all nations and under all religions from the earliest period, that the penalty incurred by the violation of sacred things . . . attaches not only to the criminal but also to the whole of his posterity. . . . Entire families become obnoxious to punishment for the guilt of their head. . . . Subjects also are afflicted for the sins of their rulers. . . . Sometimes a whole nation is punished for the iniquity of one of the people' (184, 188-90). The sin of our first parents was a most heinous offence, for 'what sin can be named which was not included in this one act? It comprehended at once credulity in the assurances of Satan and distrust in the divine veracity, unbelief, ingratitude, disobedience, gluttony, uxoriousness in the man and a want of proper regard for her husband in the woman, insensibility in both to the welfare of their offspring (the whole human race), parricide, theft, invasion of the rights of others, sacrilege, deceit, presumption in aspiring to divine attributes, fraud in the means employed, pride, and arrogance' (180-2). Such were Milton's convictions about the human motives involved in a story he was soon to tell poetically—a story in which generations of slogan-seeking or oversimplifying critics would later try to find the operation of only one or two simple motives. Milton saw the Fall of man (or at least of Eve) as a complicated matter. Still, the providence of God is observable in the Fall, which brought not only misery but also the restoration of man. [xv. 178–200]

According to Scripture death came into the world as the punishment of sin. Since, however, physical death did not, in fact, immediately follow, Milton agreed with other theologians in recognizing four degrees of death, the first being guiltiness and like evils which appeared after the Fall and led to death. The second degree was spiritual death, with its partial deprivation of right reason and the liberty to do good. This punishment did not, Milton thought, completely extinguish the original excellence of man, and some traces of the divine image remain in his understanding and in his limited freedom of will, enabling him to perform indifferent actions and good endeavours. 'For if our personal religion were not in some degree dependent on ourselves, and in our own power, God could not properly enter into a covenant with us' (214). As for physical death, Milton could not accept the common definition of a separation of soul and body. Since the body has no life apart from the mind, the body alone cannot be said to die. Moreover, since the mind was the part principally offending, the mind could not have escaped punishment. The whole man sinned, and God pronounced the punishment of death upon the whole man, not excepting any part; therefore, the whole man—body, spirit or soul—dies. Such, Milton declared, was the doctrine of the saints and believers of old, the patriarchs, the prophets, and the Apostles; and such a 'heresy' could hardly condemn one to the fourth and final degree of death, death eternal, the punishment of the damned. [xv. 202–50]

Man's restoration, or delivery through Christ from sin and death to a state of grace more excellent than that from which he fell, comprises the processes of redemption and renovation. Even before man had confessed his guilt and been sentenced, God evidenced His infinite grace by promising to raise up from the woman's seed One who would bruise the serpent's head; and Christ, the voluntary redeemer and sole mediator, came into the world at the appointed time. Summarizing these events from Scripture, Milton declared that the greatest mystery of religion is the Incarnation, whereby Christ, being God, took upon Himself human nature and was made flesh, yet remained numerically the same. We should not try to devise subtle explanations of this act, he concluded, but rest content to know that the Son of God was both God and man in reality. The efficient cause of His conception as man was the virtue of the Father, not the Holy Spirit. Christ the mediator performed, and continues to perform, everything requisite for man's reconciliation with God and eternal salvation. As prophet Christ instructs the Church in heavenly truth; as priest He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sinners, and continues to intercede for men by rendering prayers agreeable to God; as king He governs the Church, chiefly by an inward law and spiritual power, and conquers its enemies. His voluntary submission of Himself as God-man to the divine justice both in life and in death, His humiliation for man's redemption, was followed by His resurrection, His ascension into Heaven, and His return to a seat at the right hand of God; and since both the divine and human natures suffered in His humiliation, so both participate in His exaltation—a satisfaction which Christ made, not for the elect alone, but for all mankind. This is the ministry of redemption. 'The fable of a Purgatory', Milton noted, is not even mentioned in Scripture (338). [XV. 250–340]

Man's renovation, thus made possible by redemption, is a change into a state of grace by either a natural or a supernatural mode. The natural mode may involve either the 'calling' of all mankind to a knowledge of the true God, or the calling more frequently, and with a more marked call than to others, of particular individuals, elect or reprobate. This calling partly renews the natural mind and will, so that man seeks God and undergoes a change for the better; but the change ensures salvation only if man is also regenerate. The supernatural mode of renovation restores to man, more completely than before, the use of his power to form right judgement and to exercise free will; through the death and resurrection of Christ the old, sinful man is destroyed, and the inward man is regenerated after the image of God. This change, called regeneration, or sanctification, results first in God's gift of repentance, and then in saving faith—a belief that the things which God promised in Christ, especially the grace of eternal life, are indeed ours. 'From faith arises hope, a most assured expectation of those future things which are already ours in Christ' (406). Milton emphasized, however, that 'the ultimate object of faith is not Christ the Mediator, but God the Father', and remarked that 'it ought not to appear wonderful if many, both Jews and others, who lived before Christ or have lived since His time, but to whom He has never been revealed, should be saved by faith in God alone' (402–4). [XV. 342–408]

After regeneration, Milton continued, believers are 'ingrafted in Christ', by God the Father 'made partakers of Christ and meet for becoming one with Him' (2). With newness of life, or self-denial, man loves holiness and comprehends spiritual things. Love, or charity, arises from the sense of divine love shed in the hearts of the regenerate, who become dead to sin and alive again to God, bringing forth good works spontaneously. An absolute or internal increase of the divine gifts also follows. 'As for perfection, although not to be expected in this life, it is our duty to strive after it with earnestness, as the ultimate object of our existence'; hence, Milton added, 'the struggle between the flesh and the spirit in the regenerate' (18). Justification and adoption are the names given the relative or external increase which has reference to the Father alone: 'Justification is the gratuitous purpose of God whereby those who are regenerate and ingrafted in Christ are absolved from sin and death through His most perfect satisfaction, and accounted just in the sight of God, not by the works of the law, but through faith' (24). Although all men and angels are by nature the sons of God, God's adopted children, 'those justified through faith' (50) are made heirs through Christ and become sons of God by a new generation. A further relative increase may be their earthly reward: union and fellowship with the Father through the Son, and a consciousness (called imperfect glorification) of present grace and future glory in such a degree that blessedness is already begun. From fellowship with the Father arises that mutual fellowship of the members of Christ's body, called the communion of saints, and the mystical body called the invisible church, of which Christ is head. Since the body of Christ is mystically one, Milton noted, 'the fellowship of His members must also be mystical, not confined to time or place' (62). Union with this body, assurance of salvation, and the final perseverance of the saints are as much as good men can attain in this life. [XVI. 1–96]

Perfect glorification is effected in eternity, its consummation commencing from the time of Christ's second coming, a time known only to God, although certain signs will herald its approach. It will be followed by the resurrection of the dead (both body and soul), by a change in the living, and by judgement of the evil angels and all mankind. The good will be rewarded and the wicked doomed to eternal damnation; Christ will reign for a time on earth; and after the polluted earth has been destroyed by fire, all will be renewed. [XVI. 336–80]

The Mosaic law, Milton pointed out, had been imperfect. Imposed on an unwilling people, it had promised only temporal life; it could not justify, and mankind could not fulfil it. It was 'a written code consisting of many precepts intended for the Israelites alone, with a promise of life to such as should keep them and a curse on the disobedient, to the end that they, being led thereby to an acknowledgement of the depravity of mankind, might have recourse to the righteousness of the promised Saviour; and that they, and in the process of time all nations, might be led under the Gospel from the weak and servile rudiments of this elementary institution to the full strength of the new creature and a manly liberty worthy the sons of God' (102–4). The Mosaic law was succeeded, therefore, by the Gospel, the new and perfect covenant of grace, which has willing followers, promises eternal life, justifies, and contains the possibility of man's fulfilling it—a dispensation ordained to continue to the end of the world. From the revocation of the old law results Christian liberty, whereby we are loosed, through Christ, 'from the bondage of sin and consequently from the rule of the law and of man, to the intent that being sons instead of servants, perfect men instead of children, we may serve God in love through the guidance of the spirit of truth' (152–4). [XVI. 98–162]

Under the Mosaic law 'the sealing of the covenant of grace', its representation under outward signs, consisted in circumcision and the Passover. Under the Gospel these outward signs, ceremonies known as sacraments, consist in baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Still resting his belief on the testimony of Scripture, Milton observed that these sacraments are neither indispensable nor the exclusive prerogative of ordained ministers. Baptism, he further asserted, should be performed in running water, and should not be administered to infants, since they are incompetent to enter into the covenant. Although Scripture sanctions the solemnizing of the Lord's Supper, transubstantiation and consubstantiation are doctrines irreconcilable with either Scripture or reason. And to Milton, confirmation, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage were not sacraments at all. Marriage, he stated, is a civil rather than a religious compact, and its celebration is not a prerogative of clergymen. [XVI. 164–218]

Since Christ is the head of the mystical and invisible church, no one besides Christ has the right of presiding over the visible church, or assembly of those called by God. Milton found in Scripture no authority for the establishment of an earthly head in the person of Peter and his successors. The ministers of the universal visible church are persons appointed by divine commission to perform various offices. Any believer endowed with the necessary gifts is competent to act as an ordinary minister, but each such minister should undergo a special trial at the hands of members of the church. 'The choice of ministers belongs to the people' (290), that is, to persons well taught in Scriptural doctrine and capable of trying by rule of the Scripture and the Spirit any prospective teacher. Ordinary ministers are the presbyters (sometimes called bishops) and the deacons; and both classes should rely on the good will and liberality of the church, not on civil edicts, for remuneration. 'To exact or bargain for tithes or other stipendiary payments under the Gospel, to extort them from the flock under the alleged authority of civil edicts, or to have recourse to civil actions and legal processes for the recovery of allowances purely ecclesiastical, is the part of wolves rather than of ministers of the Gospel' (300). Extraordinary ministers are persons inspired and sent on special missions by God to plant or to reform the church by preaching or by writing. The people of the church, Milton declared, comprise all those who are called in every part of the world and who worship God through Christ in any place whatever, either collectively or individually. 'Although it is the duty of believers to join themselves if possible to a church duly constituted . . . yet such as cannot do this conveniently, or with full satisfaction of conscience, are not to be considered as excluded from the blessing bestowed by God on the churches' (232–4). Each church, however small, is an integral and perfect church, and in its own religious rights has no superior on earth. Discipline, the bond by which a particular church is held together, consists in mutual agreement to fashion lives according to Christian doctrine and to regulate public meetings with decency and order. Women, for example, are enjoined to keep silence in the church. The administration of discipline, Milton emphasized, belongs to each particular church collectively, without intervention of the civil magistrate. [XVI. 218–48, 284–336]

As for the particular time of public worship, although God hallowed the seventh day in remembrance of the consummation of His work, the Sabbath does not seem to have been instituted until the delivery of the Law on Mount Sinai. This ordinance was revoked, Milton concluded, with the rest of the Mosaic law, and no particular day was appointed in its stead. Similarly, before the giving of the Law public worship was not confined to any definite place; under the Law it was held partly in the synagogue, partly in the temple; and under the Gospel any convenient place is proper. External worship of God after the form and manner that He has prescribed comprises invocation of God and the sanctification of His name in all circumstances of life. Invocation consists of supplication and thanksgiving, oaths, and the casting of lots. In supplication man, under the guidance of the Spirit, reverently asks of God, through faith in Christ, things lawful either for himself or for others. Set forms of supplication are superfluous, Milton asserted; prayers need not even be audible or articulate; all places are equally suitable, and no particular posture of the body is enjoined. 'The Lord's Prayer was intended rather as a model of supplication than as a form to be repeated verbatim' (84). Prayers may be assisted by fasting and vows, or accompanied by the singing of hymns. Idolatry and the invocation of angels and saints are opposed to true invocation of God. As for the casting of lots, we thus 'appeal to the Deity for the explanation of doubts and the decision of controverted questions' (132). [XVII. 72–192]

'Internal worship, or the worship of the heart, is accepted of God even where external forms are not in all respects duly observed' (78). It consists 'mainly in the acknowledgement of the one true God and in the cultivation of devout affections toward Him' (50), that is, the virtues of love, trust, hope, gratitude, fear, humility, patience, and obedience. All true worship, internal or external, involves the exercise of good works, whose essential form is not their accordance with the decalogue but with faith, which alone justifies. Works of supererogation are impossible, Milton decided. Wisdom and prudence are the general virtues which belong to the understanding; sincerity, promptitude, and constancy are those which belong to the will. But all virtues, or good habits in which are comprehended the whole of our duty towards God and towards man, are the proximate causes of good works—God, of course, being the primary cause. [XVII. 2–72]

Cataloguing and classifying the numerous Christian virtues, Milton incidentally expressed his convictions, sometimes at length, on various ethical and moral problems which had fascinated men of his century. He found no basis in Scripture for 'the opinion, maintained by some, that obedience is due the commands, not only of an upright magistrate, but of a usurper, and that in matters contrary to justice'. On the other hand, he confessed 'that it may be the part of prudence to obey the commands even of a tyrant in lawful things, or, more properly, to comply with the necessity of the times for the sake of public peace and personal safety' (XVII. 402–4). Veracity he defined as

> speaking the truth to all who are entitled to hear it, and in matters which concern our neighbour's good. . . . Not every concealment of the truth is wrong, inasmuch as we are not on all occasions required to declare what we know. Concealment is blameable which proceeds from improper motives. . . . Not only the dissimulation or concealment of truth, but even direct untruth with the intention of deceiving, may in many instances be beneficial to our neighbour. . . . Who would scruple to dissemble with a child, a madman, a sick person, an inebriate, an enemy, a person with a design to deceive us, a robber? [XVII. 296–8]

Revoking a promise once made, or recalling a benefit once conferred, 'would seem to be allowable when the person on whom the promise or benefit was bestowed proves himself unworthy of our kindness' (318). In almsgiving, 'we are to be guided by geometrical rather than arithmetical proportion, regulating our bounty according to the rank and dignity, the education and previous condition of each individual, lest we fall into the absurdity of equalizing those whom nature never intended for an equality' (374). Milton warned against 'an excess of humanity, which makes provision for the idle and undeserving', and he quoted approvingly the words of Scripture: 'If any would not work, neither should he eat' (264). As for the problem of usury, the scrivener's son defended the practice, though with qualifications:

> In loans, justice is violated by the exaction of immoderate interest, by which is meant all interest taken from the poor. . . . If it be lawful to receive profit for the use of cattle, lands, houses, and the like, why not of money also? which, when borrowed (as it often is) not from necessity but for purposes of gain, is apt to be more profitable to the borrower than to the lender. . . . Under the Gospel, therefore, that usury only is to be condemned which is taken from the poor, or of which the sole object is gain, and which is exacted without a regard to charity and justice—even as any other species of lucrative commerce carried on in the same spirit would be equally reprehensible . . . [XVII. 338–40]

Eight per cent., it would seem, was a good Christian profit if the lender were pious and the borrower able to repay.

Milton lists almost all the possible Christian virtues in Book Two of his *De Doctrina Christiana*, but his definitions are often revealing to the searcher for biography. The virtue of gravity he defines as 'an habitual self-government of speech and action, with a dignity of look and manner, befitting a man of holiness and probity' (320). Two other virtues are courteousness, or 'affability and readiness of access', and urbanity, which 'comprehends not only the innocent refinements and elegances of conversation, but acuteness and appropriateness of observation or reply' (322). *Modestia* 'consists in thinking humbly of ourselves, and in abstaining from self-commendation, except when occasion requires it' (234–6); and allied to this virtue is 'the love of an unspotted reputation and of the praises of good men, with a proportionate contempt for those of the wicked' (238). Milton admits, however, that social intercourse with the wicked 'is sometimes unavoidable in the present life' (278). Friendship among good men he praises highly; 'it takes precedence of all degrees of relationship' (274). Another Christian virtue is magnanimity, shown when 'in the seeking or avoiding, the acceptance or refusal of riches, advantages, or honours, we are actuated by a regard to our own dignity, rightly understood' (240). 'Allied to this is indignation at the unfounded praises or undeserved prosperity of the wicked. . . . The vehemence of its expression sometimes borders on indecency' (244). Opposed to magnanimity is pride, 'when a man values himself without merit, or more highly than his merits deserve, or is elated by some insignificant circumstance' (246). Candour is the virtue 'whereby we cheerfully acknowledge the gifts of God in our neighbour, and interpret all his words and actions in a favourable sense' (310). 'Frugality consists in avoiding expense, so far as is seemly, and in wasting nothing which is capable of being applied to a useful purpose' (230). 'Liberality is a temperate use of our honest acquisitions in the provision of food and raiment, and of the elegancies of life' (232).

In the process of cataloguing the various virtues Milton managed to include his concise opinion on a number of interesting matters. There are occasions, he declared, 'on which tears are not unbecoming even a wise man', and on which 'even the bravest may be influenced by fear' (XVII. 206). 'Sensibility to pain, and even lamentations, are not inconsistent with true patience' (252), of which stoical apathy, therefore, is an opposite. Flagellation is an example of hypocritical patience. 'Compassion extends even to animals' (268). From irascibility, an excess of anger, 'even the best of men are not always exempt' (208). 'Hatred is in some cases a religious duty, as when we hate the enemies of God or of the Church'; indeed, 'we are to hate even our dearest connexions if they endeavour to seduce or deter us from the love of God and true religion' (258). Revenge is forbidden by Scripture—but not avenging the Church, or desiring 'that she be avenged of her enemies' (288). 'Freedom of speech consists in speaking the truth with boldness' (324). Christ is 'the great pattern of fortitude'

(248). 'Inasmuch as God is best served by internal worship, and whereas man stands more in need of outward attention, the external service even of God is sometimes to be postponed to our duties towards men' (194). Our neighbours in the Scriptural sense are 'all to whom we have the opportunity of rendering service or assistance'—'chiefly believers, however' (254).

Finding war nowhere forbidden in the New Testament, Milton concluded it to be as lawful now as in the time of the Jews. He noted, however, the Scriptural injunctions 'that it be not undertaken without mature deliberation', that it be prosecuted with moderation and in a spirit of godliness, and 'that no mercy be shown to a merciless enemy' (406). On the subject of state control of religion, he expressed convictions he had several times voiced in print:

> Religion is to be protected by the magistrate, not forced upon the people. . . . If kings are forbidden to exercise violence against religious persons in any matter whatever, much more are they forbidden to force the consciences of such persons in the matter of religion itself, especially on points where the magistrate is fully as liable to be mistaken as the Pope . . . In our own times Christians are on many occasions persecuted or subjected to punishment for matters either purely controversial, or left by Christian liberty to the judgement of each believer, or concerning which there is no express declaration in the Gospel. . . . Undoubtedly, as the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, so neither is it sustained by force and compulsion, the supports of earthly rule. Hence the outward profession of the Gospel ought not to be made a matter of constraint; and as to the inner parts of religion, faith and liberty of conscience, these are beyond its power, being from their very nature matter of ecclesiastical discipline alone, and incapable of being affected by the determination of human tribunals—not to mention the absurdity and impiety of compelling the conscientious to adopt a religion which they do not approve, or of constraining the profane to bear a part in that public worship from which God hath interdicted them. [XVII. 394–8]

Among additional passages of autobiographical significance there is a defence, not for the first time in Milton's writing, of the use of strong language in expressing vehemence or indignation. 'Obscenity, properly speaking, consists neither in word nor in action, but in the filthiness of mind of anyone who perverts them from their proper import, out of derision or wantonness' (324). There is also a sentence which the author of the famous *Defensio* must have dictated with peculiar satisfaction: 'The prophet Samuel did not consider it beneath his dignity in his old age, after having exercised the most important public functions, to discharge the office of teacher in the schools of the prophets' (358).

It is clear from the *De Doctrina Christiana* that Milton in all earnestness came to think of himself as an inspired religious teacher, a modern Samuel in the schools of the prophets. In the preface to his completed work, he stated that after a diligent perseverance in his plan for several years (*per aliquot annos*) he perceived Protestantism to be sufficiently fortified against Roman Catholicism—but neglected in many other quarters. It seemed to him that a more reliable reformation remained to be achieved. While certain truths eluded him when he first realized this, he continued in the conviction that God would open the truth to anyone really sedulous in the search. Eventually he was persuaded that he had discovered what was matter of belief in religion and what was merely matter of opinion. In any case he had compiled 'a precious aid' for his own faith, removing all grounds of hesitation or uncertainty, and enabling him to render, when necessary, a clear account of the principles of his belief. These statements suggest that his arrival at some of his unorthodox interpretations came late in the composition of the treatise. We cannot, however, give an accurate date for any of these; we can only say that, probably before 1658 and the undertaking of the epic, Milton was a unique combination of semi-Arian, Arminian, Anabaptist, anti-Sabbatarian, Mortalist, semi-Quaker, 'Divorcer', and polygamist. He embraced enough heresies to inspire a new catalogue by a Pagitt or an Edwards. And despite his personal courage and conviction, but influenced perhaps by his public office, he postponed publication of his book, awaiting a more propitious time that was never to come.[10]

Milton's preface to his *Christian Doctrine*, which may not have been dictated until the last years of his life, when he considered publishing the work abroad, is an anxious plea for toleration of his unorthodoxy. He calls God to witness that it is with 'a friendly and benignant feeling towards mankind' that he offers the world his 'best and richest possession' (8), and therefore hopes that no one will take unjust offence. Addressing himself to the learned reader, or at least to men of mature understanding of Christian doctrine, he calls attention to the fact that he has filled his pages, not with explanations of his own opinions, but with quotations from Scripture. He recommends nothing on his own authority. The judicious will not, therefore, stamp as heresy whatever differs from received opinion until they have tried the doctrine by comparison with the testimony of Scripture. 'Neither adopt my views nor reject them', he advises, 'unless every doubt has been removed from your belief by the clear testimony of revelation' (XIV. 14). This search for truth should not be disturbing to the Church, for freedom of inquiry and discussion should be granted all believers. He hopes that others will follow his simple and sure method. Without the Christian liberty of sifting every doctrine and writing about it according to individual faith and persuasion, there is neither religion nor gospel; force alone prevails, and we are all enslaved under a barbarous tyranny. Thus spoke pure Protestantism.

As an index to Milton's mind and character, the *Christian Doctrine* is a remarkably revealing work. His absorbing devotion to its single purpose led him willingly to discard his own great learning. He rarely introduces an allusion of any kind. He sacrifices, too, every opportunity of producing a book with literary merit; the summary in the foregoing pages is in one respect very misleading, for the treatise itself is a vast jumble of some seven thousand proof texts from the Bible, almost concealing the sturdy framework of comment and classification. But that framework is architecturally fascinating. It has not one, but two foundations. One must look closely in order to detect which is supporting any given part of the structure. For many of Milton's beliefs are based upon a literal reading of words accepted as divinely inspired, while others are based upon a sincere if somewhat extreme application of Protestant individualism. When his common sense has been offended, or when he has to reconcile apparent contradictions, or when he is compelled to reason beyond ambiguity or silence, Milton consults his own soul, calling, no doubt, upon the Holy Spirit for guidance. At such moments he believes, with George Fox and other Quakers, in the efficacy of the 'inner light'. He also reminds us that, 'even on the authority of Scripture itself, everything in Scripture is ultimately to be referred to the Spirit and the unwritten word' (XVI. 280).

In his chapter on the Bible, Milton accepts the orthodox view of the canonical books, and explains the process of man's belief in their divine inspiration:

> we set out with a general belief in their authenticity, founded on the testimony of either the visible Church or the existing manuscripts; afterwards, by an inverse process, the authority of the Church itself, and of the different Books as contained in the manuscripts, is confirmed by the internal evidence implied in the uniform tenor of Scripture considered as a whole; and, lastly, the truth of the entire volume is established by the inward persuasion of the Spirit working in the hearts of individual believers. [XVI. 278][11]

On its own testimony, the Bible is 'adapted for the daily hearing or reading of all classes and orders of men' (254); and 'partly through its simplicity, partly through the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit, it is plain and perspicuous in all things necessary to salvation' (258). Therefore, 'the liberty of investigating Scripture thoroughly is granted to all. . . . It is not within the province of any visible church, much less that of the civil magistrate, to impose their interpretations on us as laws, or as binding on the conscience, that is, as matter of implicit faith. . . . The rule and canon of faith, therefore, is Scripture alone. . . . The Church cannot be the rule or arbiter of that on which itself is founded' (266). However, 'no passage of Scripture is to be interpreted in more than one sense', although in the Old Testament 'this sense is sometimes a compound of the historical and the typical' (268). And 'no inferences from the text are to be admitted but such as follow necessarily and plainly from the words themselves' (262–4). Each man is to seek for himself the true meaning, paying no regard to human traditions, written or unwritten, and not trusting the opinions of either our forefathers or antiquity.

On the other hand, the Bible is not to be interpreted, Milton declares, by the unassisted judgement of men, 'but by means of that Holy Spirit promised to all believers' (258–60). Of our two great religious guides, the Holy Spirit, 'the peculiar possession of each believer' (274), is more reliable than 'the external Scripture'. Why? The New Testament in particular

> has been liable to frequent corruption, and in some instances has been corrupted, through the number and occasionally the bad faith of those by whom it has been handed down, the variety and discrepancy of the original manuscripts, and the additional diversity produced by subsequent transcripts and printed editions. . . . The New Testament has come down to us through the hands of a multitude of persons, subject to various temptations, nor have we in any instance the original copy in the author's handwriting by which to correct the errors of the others. Hence Erasmus, Beza, and other learned men have edited from the different manuscripts what in their judgement appeared most likely to be the authentic readings. It is difficult to conjecture the purpose of Providence in committing the writings of the New Testament to such uncertain and variable guardianship, unless it were to teach us by this very circumstance that the Spirit which has been given to us is a more certain guide than Scripture . . . [274–8]

Led to the dread summit and extreme verge of Higher Criticism, Milton, like Gloucester in *Lear*, has leaped blindly and been saved by a guiding spirit. The text of the Bible may be corrupt, and human reason may be unreliable, but 'it is not easy to deceive a man who is really spiritual' (274). On the evidence of Scripture he believed that we have lost 'some of the instructions of the Apostles to the churches', some 'matters profitable for doctrine'; and, characteristically, he concluded that they 'are to be supplied, not by the decrees of popes or councils, much less by the edicts of magistrates, but by the same Spirit which originally dictated them, enlightening us inwardly' (270). And if professed believers differ among themselves? 'It is their duty to tolerate such difference in each other until God shall have revealed the truth to all' (266).[12]

Such were Milton's views, and over a period of some years he dictated them to various amanuenses, elaborating points here, adding quotations there, letting the book grow steadily within its carefully planned framework. As time went by, he thus cleared his mind for any future composition of a religious nature.

* * *

Meanwhile his daily life was busy with social, official, and even additional literary activities. In November 1656, when he had married Katherine Woodcock, his former pupil Richard Barry, Earl of Barrymore, had also married for the second time; his new wife was Martha, sister of Milton's young friend Edward Lawrence, who in this same month had been elected a Member of the House of Commons, at the age of twenty-three.[13] Milton saw a good deal of Edward during these years, perhaps occasionally in the role of amanuensis. We might assume this from the cordial sonnet written earlier, but there is corroboration in a letter to Milton from another admirer, Henry Oldenburg, sent from Oxford on 28 December 1656; Oldenburg asked that best wishes be conveyed to Lawrence. The letter was chiefly devoted to thoughts about the Christmas season: Oldenburg doubted that Christ was actually born on 25 December, and he was sure, in any case, that the holiday was abused by people who called themselves Christians. We do not have Milton's reply to this learned and respectful letter, but the writer does not sound like someone thinking to start an argument.[14]

The hopefully precocious Edward Lawrence had only another year to live.[15] The poet, who in his own youth had written so many verses on death, produced none to commemorate the ever-increasing number of losses that he suffered now, in his maturity. In December 1656 his father's long-time tenant, Sir Matthew Lister, died, and in the following January it was Mrs. Susanna Sandelands, wife of his old acquaintance from Christ's College days.[16] On 13 January it was a close friend, Colonel John Hobson; he was buried four days later at St. Botolph's, Aldersgate, and Milton probably had someone take him to the funeral.[17] On 13 May 1657 Edward Skinner, Cyriack's brother, died, leaving a wife and several children.[18] During the following summer a distant cousin, John Jeffreys of Maldon, Essex, died at the age of seventy-two, and his will, proved on 21 September, left small bequests to both Christopher and John Milton.[19] Jeffreys's sister, Mrs. Hester Blackborough, was named executrix of his will; it was in her friendly home that Milton's reconciliation with his first wife had taken place, a dozen years before, and there is no reason to doubt that visits back and forth had continued. The widow Blackborough made her own will on 17 November, and the next day she was dead. We may be confident that Milton attended her funeral on 21 November, in the church of St. Anne and St. Agnes, Aldersgate.[20]

At some time during 1657 one of the poems which Milton had written at Cambridge on the death of old Hobson was reprinted in a new edition of *A Banquet of Jests*, and both of them were reprinted the following year in another anthology, *Wit Restor'd, in Severall Select Poems Not Formerly Published*.[21] His anonymous appearance in these frivolous collections may never have been called to his attention, but we may feel confident that he was informed of the publication, in February 1657, of the long-awaited Polyglot Bible prepared by Brian Walton. Though no such copy has survived, we may be equally confident that he acquired this scholarly work at once for use in his own *De Doctrina Christiana*.

He was still visited from time to time by admiring foreigners. One such, young Peter Heimbach, had come to see him in the summer of 1656, and then or later Milton presented to him an inscribed copy of his 1645 *Poems*. Moreover, when Heimbach had left for the Continent in August, expecting to return to England within two months, Milton had asked a favour of him. Despite blindness he felt the need in his studies of a better atlas than any he owned, and having heard of two recently published or about to be published at Amsterdam, he had asked Heimbach to inquire the price. The information was staggering: Heimbach wrote that one of them cost 130 florins. On 8 November, four days before his marriage to Katherine, Milton dictated a letter of thanks, saying ruefully that it was becoming as expensive to build a library as to furnish a country house. (He may have visited, not long before making this remark, the sumptuous country house of Sir Thomas Vyner at Hackney, where the mother and sister of his bride-to-be were living.) He mingled humour and pathos in his reply to his young admirer: 'It must be the African mountain, Atlas, not a book, that you tell me is for sale at so huge a price. . . . To me certainly, because of my blindness, painted maps can be of little use, since I vainly survey with sightless eyes the orb of the earth; and the more I should spend on that book, the more grievous I fear would seem the loss of my own orbs.' He did not ask Heimbach to purchase the atlas for him, but hoped that his young friend, before returning to England, would ascertain the total number of volumes and the relative merits of the editions by John Janssen and John Blaeu.[22]

Occasionally there were letters of state sent to him to be put into Latin. On 14 May 1656 he had prepared one addressed to King Louis XIV of France, asking the return of an English ship which had been captured by a Royalist pirate and taken as a prize to Dunkirk.[23] One of its owners was John Dethicke, Lord Mayor of London. Cromwell knighted Dethicke on 15 September, and when no answer from France had been received by November, Milton was ordered to translate a second, stronger demand to the French king.[24] His interest in the matter was now more than routine, since it was Dethicke who had just married him to Katherine Woodcock. His interest in another kind of letter, dispatched on 4 December to Frederick III of Denmark, must also have been considerable.[25] In it Cromwell urged the dangers to Protestantism in a break between Denmark and Sweden, and stressed the importance of peace and union among all Protestant nations.

During the whole first half of 1657 Milton seems to have enjoyed a good deal of leisure for his own literary and scholarly pursuits. About twenty letters of state known to be his work belong to this year, but most of them were dictated in August and later. In March there was a letter to William, Landgrave of Hesse, concerned with Protestant union in Germany;[26] in April there were letters to Danzig and to the Czar of Russia, the latter introducing Richard Bradshaw as envoy.[27] Then, in August, there were letters to six foreign states introducing William Jephson, envoy to the King of Sweden,[28] and letters on other matters to Hamburg and to Count de Bordeaux, the French ambassador.[29] In September there were letters to Frederick William, Marquis of Brandenburg, and to Ferdinand, Grand

Duke of Tuscany;[30] in October, another letter to the French ambassador, and one to the Duke and Senate of Venice;[31] in November and December, letters to the States-General of the United Provinces;[32] and in December, another letter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany and a letter of credence for George Downing, appointed agent to The Hague.[33]

Milton's good friend, Lady Ranelagh, had gone over to Ireland in October 1656, and it may have been from her that he learned, some months later, about the plight of a grandson of the famous poet, Spenser. This young man had inherited a large estate in Kilcolman, County Cork, which Queen Elizabeth had gratefully conferred upon his grandfather, but because he had professed Roman Catholicism, the lands had been confiscated in 1654. The boy had since attained his majority, had been reconverted to Protestantism, and was now suffering extreme poverty. He was a virtuous youth, 'of a civil conversation'; his story—and ancestry—moved Milton to intervene. The facts are obscure, but it seems probable that Milton wrote or spoke to Cromwell on young William Spenser's behalf. In any case, Cromwell acted, on 27 March 1657, and four months later the Council in Ireland voted to restore most of the confiscated property. It was Milton's anonymous biographer who knew that the poet had somehow 'procured relief' for 'the grandchild of the famous Spenser, a Papist suffering in his concerns in Ireland'. He gave no details, but offered this as an example of Milton's freedom from narrow partisanship. It is a pleasant one to retell.[34]

In March of 1657 Milton further demonstrated his allegiance to the republic of letters by assisting a Frenchman in a piece of scholarly investigation. Emeric Bigot, a native of Rouen, had acquired a work on the manner of holding parliaments, and his study of it had led him to want certain points checked by reference to manuscripts in England. Some years earlier, Bigot had been in London and, like so many other visiting foreigners, had called to pay his respects to the author of the *Defensio* against Salmasius. He was then a young man in his late twenties, learned, modest, and passionately devoted to literature. Milton may have remembered him as also the owner of an excellent library and the correspondent of a number of distinguished Europeans. In any case, when Bigot wrote to him, asking for help in his study of parliamentary procedures, Milton was glad to co-operate. Perhaps he was pleased to think that foreigners recognized the existence of scholarship in Cromwellian England. Bigot had enclosed a note on the various passages he wanted checked, and Milton caused them to be corrected or confirmed by manuscripts in the libraries of John Bradshaw and Sir Thomas Cotton. Bigot had also wanted to know if the author's own manuscript of the book was among the archives of the Tower of London, and since the keeper of records in the Tower, William Ryley, Norroy King-of-Arms, happened to be a friend of Milton, this information was easily obtained. There was no copy of the book in the Tower, Milton reported when he dictated a letter to Bigot on 24 March.[35]

His reply began on a personal note, friendly but self-conscious—the studied words of a public figure addressing an admirer:

> That on coming to England you should have thought me, above others, worth visiting and saluting, was naturally very gratifying to me; and that now, after such a lapse of time, you should again greet me by letter is even more gratifying. For in the first instance you might have been induced to visit me by what others said, but you could hardly renew our acquaintance by letter except at the prompting of your own judgement, or at least of your kindness. Hence I have reason to congratulate myself. Many men whose living voice and daily life presented nothing above the ordinary or out of the common have nevertheless gained reputation by their writings; and so if I can prove myself equal in mind and manners to any writings of mine which please, I shall at once add weight by my character to my writings and shall derive from them, in turn, an increase in my personal repute, however little it may amount to; since I shall seem, then, to have produced pure and sincere from the depths of my own mind and soul, and not derived from authors of established excellence, whatever is right and laudable in my composition. I am glad, therefore, to know that you are persuaded of my serenity of spirit in this great affliction of blindness, and also of my pleasure in being civil and hospitable to foreigners. Why, indeed, should I not endure calmly the loss of my sight, when I may hope that it is not so much lost as retired and withdrawn into myself, so that it sharpens rather than dulls the edge of my mind? Thus it is that I neither resent books nor quite give up the study of them, great as is the price they have exacted . . .

In asking a favour, Bigot had offered to help Milton procure literary material in return. He must have been amazed at the blind man's wants. From a Parisian press, beginning in 1645, there had appeared various volumes in a projected edition of the Byzantine historians. These sumptuous folios, containing the Greek texts with Latin translations and notes, were being published under the auspices of King Louis XIV. Milton asked Bigot to purchase for him the *Chronographia* of St. Theophanes (a chronicle of events A.D. 284–813), the *Excerpta de Antiquitatibus Constantinopolitanis* of Georgius Codinus, and—most interesting, in view of Milton's epic plans—the *Breviarium Historicum* of Constantine Manasses, a metrical chronicle of the world from the Creation to A.D. 1081. These three volumes had all been published in 1655. Milton wanted also the lives of the popes by Anastasius Bibliothecarius, the *Annales* of Michael Glycas (a history of the world from the Creation to A.D. 1118), and the twelfth-century history by Johannes Sinnamus, although he was not sure that the last two had yet been published (they had not). As for the cost, Bigot would be paid in cash by Jean Baptiste Stouppe, an agent of Thurloe, who would also see about the most convenient means of transporting the books.[36]

If Milton had waited one day before dictating this letter, he could have included news of great interest to all Frenchmen. On 25 March 1657 Cromwell's second Parliament voted to offer England's Protector a royal crown. The momentous decision climaxed a puzzling series of political manœuvres. The calling of the Parliament had been hailed as an end to arbitrary government, and the legislators had assembled to the cry of 'no swordsmen'. On the other hand, their first meeting, on 17 September 1656, had been preceded by a flurry of arrests and imprisonments of conspicuous anti-Cromwellians, including Vane, and nearly one hundred elected members had been forcibly excluded. Even so, when the House had settled down to business, it had crossed the Protector on some of his most cherished principles. As the self-appointed guardian of religious toleration he had tried vainly to prevent the persecution of James Nayler, a Quaker. On 29 January Parliament had abolished his proud 'invention' of the system of major-generalships, including the unpopular Decimation Tax on Royalists. Ten days before this setback (which Cromwell may have accepted easily because he, too, recognized its wisdom) Thurloe had risen in the House to reveal details of a plot, frustrated by the grace of God, against the Protector's life. The genuinely grateful legislators had appointed 20 February as a day of thanksgiving throughout the nation. Then, from 23 February until the end of the session, 26 June, they had debated the details of a new constitution, designed to give themselves greater powers and at the same time make Oliver king, with the right to name his own successor. The question of kingship was decided on 25 March, but Cromwell kept them, and the world, waiting until 8 May for his answer. He knew that many in the army were violently opposed. There may have been other reasons in his own heart. In any case, he refused.[37]

The new instrument of government, called a 'Humble Petition and Advice', made Oliver king in all but name, and the inauguration of his Second Protectorate on 26 June 1657 was an occasion of great pomp and ceremony. The man who had declined a crown was attired in royal purple, he held a golden sceptre in his hand, and he sat on the throne of Scotland with the legendary coronation-stone beneath. During the months that followed his installation he created more knights, a few baronets, and even several peers. He moved in an atmosphere of larger dignity and grandeur. There was a noticeable increase in the use of aristocratic forms and of courtesy titles. As if to symbolize the end of all vital opposition to the Cromwellian régime, John Lilburne died on 29 August. The great-hearted republican was carried to his grave by his latest friends, the Quakers. Magnanimously, Cromwell's Council voted a weekly allowance of forty shillings to Lilburne's widow, Elizabeth.[38]

On 5 June 1657 the case of Ashworth versus Milton, which had dragged out in the courts for more than three years, came to an end. On 2 December Christopher Milton, on behalf of his brother, had complained formally that Mrs. Ashworth's bill contained irrelevant and scandalous matter. On 4 May the court had finally ordered Richard Powell and his mother, Mrs. Anne Powell, to give their version of the facts concerning the disputed property at Wheatley. Their answer, also drawn up by Christopher Milton, was filed on 26 May. Ten days later came the final decision. The Powells were ordered to pay Elizabeth Ashworth the £300 principal on 23 October, and £260 interest on 23 January following. Milton was ordered to deliver the Wheatley premises to the Powells, who should receive all income from the property since 25 May, as well as the £4. 17*s.* 4*d.* which Milton acknowledged having already collected above and beyond the money due him for his bond and legitimate expenses. Thus, at last, the legal complications provoked by Milton's seizure of the Wheatley property in 1647 came to a conclusion apparently satisfactory to all persons concerned.[39] Christopher Milton's acting for both his brother and the Powells suggests complete accord between these parties to the dispute, and, indeed, Milton seems to have continued the management of the lands and properties until 29 November 1659, when the original statute staple bond was cancelled.[40]

On 15 July 1657 Milton dictated a letter to still another young foreigner who had paid him a visit. When Henry de Brass had called upon him, they had discussed the relative merits of Tacitus and Sallust as historians, and de Brass, eager to pursue the subject further, had since written to ask Milton's advice about certain fundamental problems in the writing of history. He particularly wanted to know how an historian could achieve the goal, set by Sallust, of producing a style in harmony with the actions described. Milton was evidently impressed by both the ability and the thirst for knowledge exhibited by his latest visitor, and he took time to answer the question so gravely propounded:

> He who would write worthily of worthy deeds must write with as noble a spirit and with as much experience of affairs as his subject possessed, in order to be able not only to comprehend and measure even the greatest of actions with equal mind, but also, having comprehended them, to relate them distinctly and impressively in a pure and chaste style. I do not much care about ornate writing, for I want an historian, not an orator. Nor do I approve of the frequent interspersion of maxims and commentary, for by such digressions the historian invades the province of the politician. The historian best fulfils his proper function by closely following truth, and not his own fancies and conjectures, when he explains counsels and narrates facts. I would add also that special quality of Sallust (which he himself particularly praised in Cato), the ability to say much in few words—a thing which I believe no one can do without keen discrimination and a certain restraint. There are many writers who provide either elegance of style or an abundance of information, but for a conjunction of brevity with abundance—that is, for saying much in a few words—the first of Latin authors is, in my judgement, Sallust.

Such was Milton's answer, reinforcing the preference he had already expressed for Sallust above Tacitus or any other Roman historian. He praised de Brass for seeking wider knowledge through travel, 'unlike most of our modern youth in their surveys of foreign lands'.[41]

Was Milton thinking of sixteen-year-old Richard Jones? Lady Ranelagh's son and his tutor, Henry Oldenburg, had left Oxford about May or June, and were now on the Continent. Lingering only a week in Paris, they had gone to Saumur in the west of France, where they meant to remain for a while. Both of them had written on 27 June/7 July to inform Milton of their safe arrival,[42] and the boy had happily (or impishly) added that he looked forward to sampling the wines of the region during the vintage season. One can imagine Milton shaking his head and smiling when he heard this. He had never ceased to dislike France, but he had thought Saumur a relatively safe place for an English boy to live and study. Still feeling some sense of responsibility for Jones's welfare, he dictated on 1 August 1657 what has been called 'the most priggish letter' he ever wrote. This criticism, however, is insensitive. One may interpret Milton's note (it is hardly more than that) as almost pathetically paternal in tone. Certainly it is good-humoured, and certainly it was intended for Oldenburg as well as Jones to read:

> I am very pleased to hear that you have completed so long a journey without mishap and, scorning the enticements of Paris, have so quickly reached a place where you can enjoy cultured leisure and the society of learned men. It is a credit to your character. So long as you continue there, you will be in harbour; elsewhere you will have to beware the Syrtes, the Rocks, and the song of the Sirens. Still, I would not have you thirst too much for the grapes of Saumur, unless you intend also to dilute with water from the Muses' Spring autumn's wines, about five parts to one. But on this subject, even if I were silent, you have an excellent adviser. If you heed him, you will not only find it to your own best interest, but will greatly please your wonderful mother and earn a daily increase in her love for you. You should pray God every day that you may be able to do this. Goodbye, and see that you return to us as virtuous and as cultured in good arts as possible. That will please me more than anyone else.[43]

Milton, be it noted, does not advise the young traveller against drinking wine. He advises moderation, and spices his counsel with an amusing pun, which my translation above barely suggests ('nisi in animo quoque sit, mustum illud Liberi liberiore Musarum latice quinta plus parte diluere'). That his mild warning was not wasted is suggested by a letter which Oldenburg wrote Robert Boyle on 8 September: 'Your nephew,' he said, 'having well spent these two or three months we have been here in more than ordinary diligence, I cannot but give him some relaxation in viewing the province of Anjou during this time of vintage—a very tempting sight to a young appetite, but it will, I hope, by a careful watchfulness, prove unprejudicial to his health.'[44]

Milton dictated a letter to Oldenburg on the same day that he wrote to Jones. There had been news in Oldenburg's letter more disturbing by far than his pupil's interest in wine. Alexander Morus, it seemed, had been invited to leave Amsterdam and become one of the ministers of the important Protestant church of Charenton, near Paris. Horrified that 'so infamous a minister has been called to instruct so famous a church', Milton declared with grim humour: 'I had rather anyone else had heard it in Charon's boat than you in the Charenton boat.' A truly reformed church would cast out such unprincipled ear-ticklers, not bring them in. Milton feared that all persons expecting to get to heaven with such a guide would find themselves a whole world awry in their calculations.

Dropping the unpleasant subject, he thanked Oldenburg for his discreet handling of the copies of the *Defensio Pro Se* which Milton had given him to distribute abroad among interested readers. He was right to give copies only to persons who actually wanted to read the book. Milton was annoyed, however, by Oldenburg's report on hostility to the latest *Defensio*, and by his apparent timidity about offering it to Frenchmen. A friend (Andrew Marvell?) who had spent the preceding summer in Saumur had assured Milton that some of the learned there had borrowed his single copy and read it with enthusiasm. 'If I had not thought that I should be doing a thing agreeable to them, I should have spared you the trouble and myself the expense.' He ended by quoting Horace: 'If perchance the parcel of my writings prove too heavy and gall your shoulders, fling it away at once . . .'[45] Doubtless recognizing that he had offended Milton, Oldenburg wrote again on 4/14 October to say: 'Don't think me so weak that I would throw away your books, which speak things worthy of immortality.'[46]

During the summer of 1657 Milton's wife was pregnant. Probably she hoped as much as he that their child would be a boy. Now forty-eight, and the father of three daughters, Milton must have prayed fervently for a son who might become the support of his old age, a bright and virtuous lad to be taught things with all his father's skill at teaching, a precocious boy, God willing, to be the steady hand and clear eye through which the blind man's maturest wisdom should be expressed. So, one supposes, Milton dreamed. He committed to paper no such intimate glimpses of himself.

In August, as we have already noted, he was kept unusually busy preparing letters of state. William Jephson was leaving as an envoy to Sweden, and Philip Meadows, who had normally helped Milton with such correspondence, was leaving as an envoy to Denmark. The Council saw that a replacement for Meadows was badly needed, and on 8 September Nathaniel Sterry was appointed to the post. About this same time Andrew Marvell was also hired as a clerical assistant, at £200 a year. When work was heavy, Samuel Hartlib and a young man named John Dryden helped in this department. Cromwell's diplomatic correspondence increased as

England became more and more involved in the complexities of European politics, and many hands were required to do the work which, in the early days of the Commonwealth, Milton had done alone.[47]

Early in the morning of 19 October the poet's wife presented him with a fourth daughter. They named her Katherine, after her mother.[48] She was to live only five months.

In December her father dictated two personal letters which have survived, but he said nothing in them about his domestic life. On 16 December he wrote once more to Henry de Brass, who was still eager to discuss Sallust and the finer points of writing history.[49] Milton, it will be remembered, had advised against the interspersion of maxims and personal comment in historical narrative; and the young foreigner had now asked him (in deferential rebuttal) to explain a passage in the third book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* which seemed to praise sententious digressions. If de Brass was hoping to score a point, he had underestimated the blind man's scholarship and retentive memory. Milton's reply was courteous but concise. He pointed out that Aristotle referred to orators, not historians; he mentioned five ancient authors who did provide the kind of precepts on the writing of history which de Brass was seeking; and he apologized for his delay in answering. The second letter, dated 18 December, was a hasty note to Peter Heimbach, stating his inability to do a favour requested.[50] Heimbach had hoped to obtain the post of secretary to George Downing, newly appointed English minister to The Hague, and he had asked Milton for a letter of recommendation. Milton replied that he understood the position to be already filled and Downing already embarked. Besides, he had few associations with men of influence, and was now much confined to his home—and willingly so.

Milton may or may not have had his attention called to the publication in 1657 of three books containing references to him. In very different ways each might have pleased him. A work by Henry Stubbe alluded to 'that excellent pen of Mr. Milton' in the Smectymnuan controversy, 'the eloquent Mr. Milton' of the *Defensio*, and, more generally, 'Milton, that glory of our English nation!'[51] Joshua Poole, in his posthumously published *English Parnassus, or a Help to English Poesie*, had listed Milton's 1645 *Poems* among more than sixty books of verse drawn upon for a collection of poetic phrases. Poole quoted about one-fifth of the *Nativity Ode* in the course of a dozen extracts, and also borrowed phrases from *L'Allegro*, *Lycidas*, *The Passion*, *May Morning*, and *Upon the Circumcision.* On the other hand, he altered some of Milton's careful wording in the process, apparently did not bother to read *Comus*, and quoted Miltonic phrases on no more than twenty-seven out of 394 possible pages.[52] The third book was printed at Strassburg, and presented two dissertations on certain passages of Milton's *Defensio* by Erhard Kieffer and Christopher Güntzer, students at the University. If Milton ever heard of these academic performances, with their laudatory verses by fellow students, he may have derived pleasure from them, for despite their attacks on his views, it was something to find his answer to Salmasius the subject of formal disputations in a European university.[53]

Probably earlier, but certainly through all of 1658 and 1659, Milton had the services of a very able amanuensis named Jeremy Picard. The distinctive and versatile handwriting of this man is today recognizable in a variety of documents dating from these years and from early 1660.[54] Perhaps Picard was also the man who, we are told, came to Milton regularly at four o'clock in the morning and read to him for half an hour from the Old Testament in Hebrew. After this bit of purposeful ritual, 'he contemplated' for two hours or so, and 'at seven his man came to him again and then read to him and wrote till dinner; the writing was as much as the reading.' Such may well have been Milton's daily routine during the composition of the *Christian Doctrine*, a complete draft of which was certainly made for him, either at this time or some other, by Picard. It may also have been his routine during the subsequent composition of an epic on God's providence. After dinner, we are told further, he 'used to walk three or four hours at a time' in the afternoon, and he would go to bed about nine. He allowed himself, it would seem, no more than six or seven hours of sleep at night.[55]

Katherine Milton fell ill 'of a consumption' after the birth of her child, and it is likely that her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Woodcock, came to live in the house in Petty France and take care of her.[56] During January Milton also had the worry of a financial transaction. As an investment he had lent £500 at six per cent. interest to Thomas Maundy, a London goldsmith, receiving by way of safeguard a statute staple bond for £1,000. Maundy, it would seem, sought a different arrangement, which was found on 14 January with the aid of a scrivener, George Perrier. Maundy leased to Milton certain property which he owned in Kensington, the lease to be void upon payment of the £500 and any interest due, Maundy meanwhile to retain possession so long as he paid £15 semi-annually on the loan. Milton's signature to this mortgage deed was written for him by Jeremy Picard, who, with Mrs. Woodcock, also witnessed the document.[57]

After not quite fifteen months of marriage, Katherine Milton died on 3 February, and they buried her on 10 February, at St. Margaret's, Westminster.[58] Her child lived until 17 March. On 20 March the baby Katherine was laid to rest near her mother, and the two of them were mourned by a man who could not see their graves—who knew their loved features only by report. It was Picard who entered the records of these deaths in Milton's Bible.[59]

If we may believe the only early biographer who is definite about the date, it was now, at a time of unutterable loss and sorrow, that Milton revived an ambition of many years before and began work in earnest on an epic poem to be entitled *Paradise Lost*.[60]

'Long choosing, and beginning late', he knew that the crucial time had come. He would be fifty the next December. Courageously, prayerfully, he turned his grief-torn mind to the great challenge, the climactic endeavour, the creation of a poetic *magnum opus*. Now waiting to be composed was the epic of his youthful dreams, the poem that would fully justify his father's faith in him and his own design of a poetical ministry. The national epic which he had fondly projected in 1640, after his return from Italy, was a theme no longer inviting. The urge to celebrate his country's promise of greatness had been satisfied with the prose *Defensiones*, which were already—so swiftly did harsh events belie the writer—something of an ironic memory. Moreover, he had found an 'argument not less but more heroic' than his once-planned Arthuriad, with its

> tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
> Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,
> Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights
> At joust and tournament, then marshaled feast
> Served up in hall with sewers and seneschals—
> The skill of artifice or office mean,
> Not that which justly gives heroic name
> To person or to poem. Me of these
> Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument
> Remains . . . [IX. 34–43]

His own experiences had dictated this higher argument, and he longed now to sing 'the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom'. He could now write, not only out of his accumulated knowledge, but also out of his heart's wisdom, guided by the heavenly muse

> who deigns
> Her nightly visitation unimplored,
> And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse. [IX. 21–24]

To England's troubles, and the world's, religion was the key. Of that he was certain. At the bottom of all ills, social and political, lay disobedience to the will of God.

But in a century of a hundred noisy sects, of new science and new scepticism, the will of God was increasingly difficult to know—the ways of His providence increasingly difficult to understand. Milton, himself an exile from orthodoxy, had felt an impelling need to clarify and order and express the Christian doctrine which satisfied his own spirit, and as he had laboured in darkness at this difficult and prosaic task, the epic subject had taken form in his mind. We cannot name the exact month or year, but we can be sure that there was faith in his voice and renewed purpose in his soul when the long-awaited moment came—when he dictated to some nameless amanuensis:

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe . . .

He had undertaken nothing less than to 'assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men'.

* * *

So much has been said in both praise and condemnation of *Paradise Lost* since its publication in 1667 that the latest critic approaches the subject with much shuffling of unmetrical feet. Moreover, to any mighty edifice there are many doors, and time can have a way of making the main entrance the one least used. The modern reader has the choice of at least three approaches to Milton's masterpiece. Let him consider well. He may dismiss as theological rubbish the 'great argument' which prompted the epic and, with purely aesthetic eyes, search for a poetic remnant, which he may or may not find. Or he may exercise his subtle brain pleasurably, and translate Milton's insights and beliefs into terms which have genuine subjective value. Or he may carefully listen to what Milton tried to say, using objective historical scholarship as an aid to hearing over such distance of time. If he takes this third, least popular course, he will probably disagree often; he may even be intellectually outraged. But only thus will he come into close personal contact with great convictions expressed with eloquence and sweeping imagination; and after such an encounter with a fellow human being, in 'real life' or in reading, no sensitive man or woman is ever quite the same.

To be moved by a memorable statement of faith and fundamental belief is to experience the 'greatness' of great poetry. It is also, when we are properly receptive, to have our sympathies stretched and strengthened, to become a little wiser, a little surer, in our own, less articulate adventuring of the spirit. One reads great poetry, not to agree or disagree, but to grow. Assent is not necessary, though understanding is. Few if any persons can today accept the basic assumptions or the explicit beliefs in the living lines of Homer or Virgil or Dante or Shakespeare, yet we cheat ourselves if we disregard the central convictions of these authors for the sake of incidental rewards in the shape of description or characterization or harmless lyricism. So with our reading of Milton. Although he did not compose *Paradise Lost* as a theological or philosophical treatise—this he had already composed in prose, to make a poetical flight possible—he nevertheless meant it to be, as grandly imagined fable, a persuasive statement of elementary truths about divine providence, man's sinful nature, and the means of becoming a better human being. We should read it as such. For John Milton's concept of life, like that of all great writers, continues 'important' whatever our differences in outlook or opinion. We shall not be the poorer if we relive his experience, gratefully allowing ourselves to be moved by the sheer magnificence of his vision.

The epic took years to complete. I shall return in later chapters to its purpose, its design, and its meaning for all of us. Meanwhile, since the problem is central and must have been resolved by the poet in the process of designing the whole, I shall venture a few words here on Milton's interpretation of the Fall.

In order to explain man's first disobedience, the consequences of which were so catastrophic for all humanity, Milton describes it as resulting from the human emotion most likely to arouse the sympathy of his readers—the human emotion which many would rank next to worship of God—man's idealistic, self-sacrificing, uncritical adherence to the woman he loves. Milton's Adam was wrong in what he did, but his was an 'heroic martyrdom', and the human race would understand. His wife was a miraculously beautiful and attractive woman, and his devotion to her approached the perfection in which they were both created. It fell short of perfection because he set no limit to it. Love which blinds judgement, and puts obedience to God second, is not 'true love' but rather 'passion'. Although Milton expected his readers to sympathize with Adam, as he himself so eloquently sympathized, it never occurred to him that any would fail to recognize this distinction (which he has Raphael explain to Adam). Even our finest human emotions become perverted when they supersede piety.

But only our finest human emotions will do as motivations of epical sins. It is precisely because every reader can identify himself with Adam in a love leading to disregard of duty, or with Satan in an ambition leading to rebellion, or with Eve in a hunger for knowledge leading to disobedience, that *Paradise Lost* is a profoundly human poem, concerned with feelings which are universal and with a spiritual problem which is timeless. It is *not* easy to deny the wishes of those we adore. It is not easy to serve when one has the abilities of a great leader and knows it. It is not easy to refuse an apparent opportunity to improve one's state by acquiring knowledge. And martyrdom, even for an unworthy cause, is a moving thing. There is thus a certain irony in Adam's references to the forbidden tree as 'this easy charge'—'one easy prohibition'—as there is in the poet's own reference to 'that sole command, / So easily obeyed'. Obedience is easy when man learns to put love of God before all other human emotions. This is the hard lesson of Christianity, as Milton understood it.

He carefully avoids oversimplifying his theme, however. Just as he everywhere enriches his narrative with analogy and allusion, so he deliberately complicates the motives of his characters and multiplies the philosophical implications of their acts. While Eve is still sinless, theologically, we recognize the various hints of her weaknesses. The causes of the Fall defy the simple, single word which some critics have tried to find for them, but they do not therefore defy comprehension. There were, in fact, three falls, not one. There was first Adam's fall from responsibility and good judgement when he yielded to Eve's whim to work apart from him in the garden; this made possible the Fall, 'the mortal sin original', when Eve yielded to temptation; and, finally, there was the 'completing' of this sin through Adam's inevitable 'compliance bad'. Adam's guilt antedated Eve's, was different from Eve's, but partook of Eve's, as Adam himself recognized and acknowledged.

The causes of Eve's fall were complex: she was credulous and curious; her 'pride and wandering vanity' were fed by Satan's praise; she even felt 'an eager appetite' for the savoury fruit. Primarily, however, she yielded 'through expectation high / Of knowledge, nor was Godhead from her thought'. These closely allied motives are stressed throughout the narrative. First viewing his intended victims, Satan resolved:

I will excite their minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with design
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with gods. . . . [IV. 522–6]

Of their rest that night, the poet exclaimed:

Sleep on,
Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek
No happier state, and know to know no more. [IV. 773–5]

But Satan caused Eve to dream, and in her dream an angel asked, 'Is knowledge so despised?' and, plucking the fruit 'able to make gods of men', offered her some:

Taste this, and be henceforth among the gods
Thyself a goddess, not to earth confined . . . [V. 77–78]

So Satan later tempted:

ye shall be as gods,
Knowing both good and evil as they know. . . .
Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste! [IX. 708–9, 732]

And so Eve hoped, and half believed, after she had eaten. That such was the epic's view of the Fall is emphasized by events even earlier and later than these. Foreseeing man's eventual disobedience, God had told his Son that the sin would be 'Affecting Godhead, and so losing all'; or, as Milton expressed it in the Argument to Book III: 'Man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to Godhead'. Finally, near the end of the epic, Adam admitted that he had sought 'Forbidden knowledge by forbidden means', and thanked Michael for giving him his fill

Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire. [XII. 279, 559–60]

All this, be it noted, urges the story of Man analogous to the story of his Tempter. Raphael had tried to warn Adam by telling him of 'the deep fall / Of those too high aspiring' in Heaven itself.

It is true that Adam, after following his wife in mortal sin, eventually adopted the prime motive of Eve—poor, befuddled Eve, who sought wisdom and Godhead, but after eating the forbidden fruit, bowed to the tree and committed the further sin of idolatry. Adam later rationalized that they both might escape punishment and become 'Gods, or angels, demi-gods'. But this was not the cause of his fall; this was not the thought in his mind when he made his momentous decision. On the contrary, he knew that Eve had been deceived, knew that she was doomed, but instantly decided: 'with thee / Certain my resolution is to die' (IX. 906–7). Feeling that he could not live without her, he regarded the situation as 'remediless'. Only later did he make his bow to artistic logic and identify himself with her vain aspirations.

The cause of Adam's fall lay in the false logic of his love, which knew no reasonable bounds. It carried him, in effect, to the point of idolatry. The Son, sitting in judgement, asked: 'Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey / Before His voice . . .?' It carried him, also, to the point of uxoriousness. The Son continued:

or was she made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
And for thee, whose perfection far excelled
Hers in all real dignity? Adorned
She was indeed, and lovely to attract
Thy love, not thy subjection; and her gifts
Were such as, under government, well seemed,
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part
And person, hadst thou known thyself aright. [X. 146–56]

And Michael, later speaking of man's woe, pronounced:

From man's effeminate slackness it begins,
. . . who should better hold his place
By wisdom, and superior gifts received. [XI. 634–6]

In Milton's own summary:

he scrupled not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceived,
But fondly overcome with female charm. [IX. 997–9]

Adam's adoration of Eve had still other aspects: it had made him uncritical, ready to believe that her wisdom matched her beauty. Although he had been told that she was inferior to him 'in the mind / And inward faculties', he confessed to Raphael:

yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems

And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded; wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discountenanced, and like folly shows;
Authority and reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic placed. [VIII. 546–59]

This idealization of his loved one, bordering on idolatry, Adam later offered the Son as the reason for his sin. Eve had seemed to him so good,

So fit, so acceptable, so divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in itself,
Her doing seemed to justify the deed.
She gave me of the tree, and I did eat. [X. 139–43]

Earlier, Raphael had warned Adam against 'attributing overmuch to things / Less excellent', and had identified this delusion with passion:

In loving thou dost well; in passion not,
Wherein true love consists not . . .
Be strong, live happy, and love—but first of all
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
His great command. Take heed lest passion sway
Thy judgement to do aught which else free will
Would not admit . . . [VIII. 588–9, 633–7]

Adam had encouraged this interpretation of his excess of love when he had confessed to Raphael:

here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmoved, here only weak
Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance.
Or nature failed in me, and left some part
Not proof enough such object to sustain,
Or from my side subducting took perhaps
More than enough . . . [VIII. 530–7]

An immediate consequence of the Fall, according to Milton, was lust, 'carnal desire inflaming'. Both Adam and Eve were 'in subjection now / To sensual appetite'; 'love's disport' was 'of their mutual guilt the seal'.

It should be clear from the foregoing that no single word will adequately describe Adam's tragic flaw. His love for his beautiful wife was paradisiacal—few passages in the entire epic are more deeply moving than those in which Milton describes their perfect wedded bliss—but Adam allowed it to become infatuation, and in its implications it amounted to idolatry. From one point of view, Adam embodied a conflict between courtly idealization or exaltation of woman and the Hebraic view that man must govern his wife because she is inferior in natural endowments. On the other hand, the appeal of Milton's poem did not and does not depend upon our awareness of social or religious theories which have become obsolete. His Adam was, clearly, superior to Eve in both knowledge and judgement, and just as clearly he abdicated his superior judgement at the dictate of love. Eve neither persuaded nor seduced him; and his prompt decision was neither a wild gamble for power nor a bargain with the Devil for superhuman knowledge. It was, instead, a desperate martyrdom—a foolish, heroic gesture—a suicidal, useless, thoroughly human choice. Adam was the author of all our woe, but what mortal man can say that, with such a companion, he would have done otherwise? He that is without Eve among us, let him cast the first stone. Milton treats Adam sympathetically; and Eve is once more the perfect wife as the epic ends—as the devoted couple slowly leave their paradise, somewhat tearful, but still walking 'hand in hand'.

Why the poet chose this way of retelling the ancient story is a question of intense interest to his biographer; but it would be imprudent to offer a conjectural biographical explanation for a decision so right artistically. In *Paradise Lost* we are given a profound reading of the human heart, and it is dubious gratitude to want to trace such insights to prosaic personal experience. That Milton, after two marriages, was capable of such insights is an important fact in his biography. So, let us never forget, is the movingly tender love poetry which he writes both for Adam *and for Eve*. One of these lyrical passages is particularly tantalizing: it is Adam's account of Eve's creation. 'Methought I saw', he tells Raphael; and in his 'dream', at the sight of her, he felt 'sweetness', 'love', and 'delight'.

> She disappeared, and left me dark, I waked
> To find her, or for ever to deplore
> Her loss . . . [VIII. 478–80]

The haunting echoes of Milton's final sonnet seem trying to tell us something. But waking abruptly from such speculation, we, too, must return to realities.

* * *

The first Parliament to meet under the 'Humble Petition and Advice' was short-lived. It came together on 20 January 1658, and was angrily dissolved by Cromwell on 4 February. The new instrument of government had revived a second or Other House, and the members of this body, soon dubbed 'Oliver's Lords', were handpicked to such an extent that Cromwell's support in the Commons was dangerously weakened. Highly displeased by the disunity at once apparent, and announcing that republicans in the Commons were actively scheming his overthrow, Cromwell declared their sessions at an end. Thereafter he governed as a sovereign, advised only by a deferential Council of State. During February and March he took steps to meet a threat from abroad, where a Spanish army was reported gathering for the restoration of the Stuarts. Royalist conspirators in England were rounded up and imprisoned, and in May and June there were trials for treason in Westminster Hall. Sir Henry Slingsby and Dr. John Hewit were beheaded; others received lesser punishments. The fear of invasion soon faded. In mid June the prestige of the Protectorate actually reached a new high point with the capture of Dunkirk from the Spanish by combined French and English troops. (The young Earl of Barrymore and young Henry Lawrence went with 'other English gallants' to witness the siege.) Then, during the unhealthy summer, when a malignant fever attacked many ordinary citizens, the great soldier who had won the dread and admiration of all Europe fell seriously ill. On 3 September, the anniversary of his great victories at Dunbar and at Worcester, he died.[61]

Milton, meanwhile, among other activities, had prepared some of Cromwell's last letters of state. On 30 March 1658, ten days after the burial of his baby daughter, he had made ready a letter to King Charles Gustavus of Sweden, in which the Protector rejoiced that a generous peace had been granted Denmark and the ideal of Protestant union thus promoted.[62] At some time during the same month the Latin Secretary had prepared a letter to the Duke of Courland.[63] On 7 April there had been another to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, requesting justice for an English sea-captain who had been swindled.[64] During May there had been at least seven letters: to the Grand Duke of Tuscany demanding respect for an English fleet;[65] to the Evangelical Swiss Cantons and to King Louis XIV of France on behalf of the Piedmontese, again threatened with massacre;[66] two others to the King of France and two to Cardinal Mazarin, all concerned with the visit to France of Cromwell's son-in-law, Thomas Belasyse, Viscount Falconbridge.[67] On 4 June there had been a letter to Charles Gustavus in which Cromwell regretted that complications both at home and abroad had delayed his efforts to promote a close league of all Protestant nations.[68] Also in June there had been two letters to Cardinal Mazarin and two to King Lous XIV.[69] In August, Milton had prepared a letter to the King of Portugal, asking justice for a London merchant.[70] This was the last service rendered the Protector by his blind secretary.

About four months before Cromwell's death Milton published a book which may or may not reflect in part his own political views at the time. He had owned for 'many years' the unprinted manuscript of a treatise thought to be by Sir Walter Ralegh, and, as he said in a brief preface, 'finding it lately by chance among other books and papers, upon reading thereof I thought it a kind of injury to withhold longer the work of so eminent an author from the public'. On 4 May 1658, therefore, he caused to be registered for publication *The Cabinet-Council: Containing the Cheif Arts of Empire, And Mysteries of State; Discabineted in Political and Polemical Aphorisms, grounded on Authority, and Experience; And illustrated with the choicest Examples and Historical Observations. By the Ever-renowned Knight, Sir Walter Raleigh, Published By John Milton, Esq;* Although Milton certainly disagreed with many sayings in this collection of practical wisdom (the advice to endure tyrants, for example), others may have struck him as having a timely value:

> great men do ever endeavour to oppress the people, and the people do labour not to be oppressed by them. . . . seldom or never shall we see any people discontented and desirous of alteration where justice is equally administered without respect of persons. . . . experience hath proved that common weals have prospered so long as good counsel did govern, but when favour, fear, or voluptuousness entered, those nations became disordered, and in the end subject to slavery. . . . as the aid and assistance of God is that which governeth all good counsels, so liberty of speech and magnanimous uttering of what is good and fit is necessary in counsellors. . . . the vulgar sort is generally variable, rash, hardy, and void of judgement. . . . The murder of tyrants is also followed with many inconveniences worse than civil war itself. . . . Whensoever a people is induced to commit so great an error as to give reputation to one only man, to the end he should oppress all those great men whom they hate, they thereby give him opportunity to become their Prince; and so being assisted with their favour and aid, he may likewise extinguish all the rest of the nobility, and they being extirpated, he will also endeavour to tyrannize over the people by whose help he aspired. . . . For such men as have gained unto themselves reputation and are accounted virtuous, to maintain that conceit and eschew envy there is nothing better than a life retired from daily conversation, and chiefly of the multitude.

These are fair samples of the aphoristic counsel to be found in the book.[71]

On the morning after Oliver's death, the firing of cannon proclaimed to Londoners the accession of the quiet, very unmilitary country gentleman whom the Protector had chosen to succeed him. His personality was so different from his father's that it had, perhaps, some of the interest offered by a new non-alcoholic beverage, called tea, which Londoners were this month sampling for the first time. In any case, the initial public response was reassuring to the anxious ones at Whitehall; and for a time, with young Richard Cromwell surprising many by his competence, the ship of state proceeded on an even keel. All civil and military appointments continued unchanged. Milton, for example, still employed as one of the secretaries for foreign tongues, during September and October prepared letters for Richard to send to Cardinal Mazarin and the kings of France and Sweden, assuring them of his desire to continue all former alliances.[72] Royalist hopes, of course, rose high with the news of Oliver's end; there was a vigorous growth in intrigue, and the exiles waited eagerly for signs of disintegration in Richard's government. The first signs appeared in the army, whose officers decided that the new Protector, so unlike his father, should not be commander-in-chief. In their opinion, an experienced military man, like Richard's brother-in-law, Fleetwood, should head the army as a kind of co-ordinate with the head of civil government. Richard's firmly stated opposition to this proposal, on 14 October, only aggravated the feeling against him. Republican sentiment in the army, long carefully suppressed by Oliver, became vocal again, and there was anti-Cromwellian talk in both high and low places. At Wallingford House and elsewhere there were meetings of army officers for the expression of grievances.[73]

Soon after the death of the great Protector, in October 1658, Milton brought out a new edition of his famous *Defensio* against Salmasius, as if to remind the English people, at this critical moment in their history, that he had once served them well. It was a clear bid for remembrance, at a time when men might forget past deeds. In a postscript he explained that he had long had in mind a more thorough revision than the one presented. (Not counting about 700 differences in spelling and punctuation, intentional or unintentional, there were something over 250 small verbal changes and corrections, including the addition and deletion of whole lines.) Milton declared that he was grateful for the commendation he had received for this service to his country, at home and abroad, and that he was fully cognizant of what he had accomplished. He chose this means of letting his well-wishers know that he now had in prospect 'yet greater things' and was considering how he might 'best bear witness, not only to my own country, to which I have paid the highest I possessed, but even to men of whatever nation, and to the cause of Christendom above all'.[74]

These words, although they just possibly could refer to either of his next two pamphlets, or to *Paradise Lost*, more probably were dictated with the *De Doctrina Christiana* in mind. The passage clearly promises a work which will do for religion what the *Defensio* did for government, only not for religion in England alone, but throughout the world. His friend John Dury had just called attention to *The Earnest Breathings of Foreign Protestants . . . for a Compleat Body of Practical Divinity* (1658). Such was the purpose of his *Christian Doctrine*, then newly completed or nearing completion. (The month was October. Milton would be fifty in December.) To publish his book with impunity, however, he needed to teach England's leaders the true meaning of the word 'heresy' and to persuade them that Christian liberty demanded more toleration of differing opinions than even Oliver had advocated. In his next publication, therefore, he attempted precisely this.

In the elaborate order of procession for Oliver's funeral on 23 November there was a place for Milton along with the other 'Secretaries of the French and Latin tongues'—Marvell, Sterry, Dryden, and Hartlib. Although proof is lacking, it is probable that the blind man actually walked (the guiding hand Marvell's?) with the many mourners from Somerset House to Westminster Abbey, where an effigy of the Protector was solemnly deposited in the Chapel of Henry VII. Oliver's body had long since been privately interred, with scarcely more ceremony than that accorded Milton's college tutor, Nathaniel Tovey, who had been buried at Aylestone, Leicestershire, on 9 September. The official funeral was, of course, a state occasion and a tribute to departed greatness. Six days after the event, Richard's Council of State decided that another Parliament should be called without delay, and 27 January was fixed as the date.[75]

During December Milton was hard at work on a pamphlet of advice to the new Parliament. He called it *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes: Shewing that it is not lawful for any power on earth to compel in matters of Religion.*[76] He kept it brief (ninety-six pages of duodecimo), and he kept the argument simple. His object was to offer four convincing reasons 'why it is unlawful for the civil magistrate to use force in matters of religion' (20), namely, that the magistrate is not able to judge, has no right to judge, does harm if he tries, and fails utterly to achieve his pretended ends. Incidentally, Milton used the occasion to present publicly some of the least shocking conclusions he had reached in composing his treatise on Christian doctrine, and also tried, as I have said, to moderate the common attitude toward 'heretical' opinions so called.

After discussing the original meaning of the Greek word 'heresy', Milton argued that in modern times the word should signify only

> a doctrine maintained against the light (which we now only have) of the Scripture. Seeing therefore that no man, no synod, no session of men, though called the Church, can judge definitively the sense of Scripture to another man's conscience—which is well known to be a general maxim of the Protestant religion—it follows plainly that he who holds in religion that belief or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appear with most evidence or probability in the Scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censured for a heretic than his censurers, who do but the same thing themselves while they censure him for so doing. . . . He, then, who to his best apprehension follows the Scripture, though against any point of doctrine by the whole Church received, is not the heretic—but he who follows the Church against his conscience and persuasion grounded on the Scripture. [12–13]

The 'best Protestants', Milton declared, are those who, guided by the Holy Spirit, reach their own conscientious interpretation of Scripture, 'though the visible Church with all her doctors gainsay'; and 'by their opinions, whatever they be, [they] can hurt no Protestant, whose rule is not to receive them but from the Scripture'. 'No man in religion is properly a heretic at this day but he who maintains traditions or opinions not probable by Scripture (who, for aught I know, is the papist only); he the only heretic, who counts all heretics but himself' (13–14).

Because these truths have not been recognized, 'how many persecutions . . . how much bloodshed have the forcers of conscience to answer for, and Protestants rather than papists! For the papist, judging by his principles, punishes them who believe not as the Church believes, though against the Scripture; but the Protestant, teaching everyone to believe the Scripture, though against the Church, counts heretical and persecutes, against his own principles, . . . them who interpret Scripture only to themselves, which by his own position none but they to themselves can interpret' (18). As for the objection that complete freedom of conscience leads to anarchy, overthrowing all church discipline, Milton answers with 'plain Scripture, which forbids not church-sentence or determining but as it ends in violence upon the conscience unconvinced' (9). Furthermore, true church discipline 'is exercised on them only who have willingly joined themselves in that covenant of union, and proceeds only to a separation from the rest—proceeds never to any corporal enforcement, or forfeiture of money' (10). And as for blasphemy 'or evil speaking against God maliciously', this is not a problem of conscience in religion; Parliament, in its excellent law of 9 August 1650, defined blasphemy 'as far as it is a crime belonging to civil judicature' (11). Idolatry, to be sure, must be punished, since it is 'evidently against all Scripture both of the Old and New Testament, and therefore a true heresy, or rather an impiety, wherein a right conscience can have naught to do, and the works thereof so manifest that a magistrate can hardly err in prohibiting and quite removing at least the public and scandalous use thereof' (20).

Papists present a problem of another sort, for their conscience, 'being implicitly enthralled to man instead of God, almost becomes no conscience', and their religion can hardly be 'acknowledged a religion, but a Roman principality rather, endeavouring to keep up her old universal dominion under a new name and mere shadow of a catholic religion, being indeed more rightly named a catholic heresy against the Scripture, supported mainly by a civil and, except in Rome, by a foreign power—justly therefore to be suspected, not tolerated, by the magistrate of another country' (19). 'Nevertheless,' Milton concludes, 'if they ought not to be tolerated, it is for just reason of state more than of religion—which they who force, though professing to be Protestants, deserve as little to be tolerated themselves, being no less guilty of popery in the most popish point' (19–20). Milton's whole argument, therefore, is that no Protestant 'of what sect soever following Scripture only . . . ought, by the common doctrine of Protestants, to be forced or molested for religion' (19).

This plea for toleration is presented as part of his first main argument in *Of Civil Power*:

> that we of these ages, having no other divine rule or authority from without us

> warrantable to one another as a common ground but the holy Scripture, and no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit so interpreting that Scripture as warrantable only to ourselves and to such whose consciences we can so persuade, can have no other ground in matters of religion but only from the Scriptures. And these being not possible to be understood without this divine illumination, which no man can know at all times to be in himself, much less to be at any time for certain in any other, it follows clearly that no man or body of men in these times can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other men's consciences but their own. [6]

Having pressed the Protestant thesis to its logical extreme, Milton draws some parallels calculated to make his readers squirm: 'If, then, we count it so ignorant and irreligious in the papist to think himself discharged in God's account believing only as the Church believes, how much greater condemnation will it be to the Protestant his condemner to think himself justified believing only as the state believes?' (6). 'Chiefly for this cause do all true Protestants account the pope antichrist: for that he assumes to himself this infallibility over both the conscience and the Scripture' (8). And yet, 'if we must believe as the magistrate appoints, why not rather as the Church? If not as either without convincement, how can force be lawful?' (10).

Milton's second main argument is that the civil magistrate has no right to judge in matters of religion:

> Christ hath a government of His own, sufficient of itself to all His ends and purposes in governing His Church, but much different from that of the civil magistrate; and the difference in this very thing principally consists, that it governs not by outward force, and that for two reasons: first, because it deals only with the inward man and his actions, which are all spiritual and to outward force not liable; secondly, to show us the divine excellence of His spiritual kingdom, able without worldly force to subdue all the powers and kingdoms of this world, which are upheld by outward force only. [20]

'To compel outward profession, which they will say perhaps ought to be compelled though inward religion cannot, is to compel hypocrisy, not to advance religion' (21–22). 'Our whole practical duty in religion', Milton emphasizes, 'is contained in charity, or the love of God and our neighbour, no way to be forced' (21). 'The Church itself cannot, much less the state, settle or impose one tittle of religion upon our obedience implicit, but can only recommend or propound it to our free and conscientious examination' (23). It has adequate means of combating error, without the aid of the civil magistrate: 'seducement is to be hindered by fit and proper means ordained in church discipline: by instant and powerful demonstration to the contrary; by opposing truth to error, no unequal match—truth the strong to error the weak, though sly and shifting. Force is no honest confutation, but uneffectual and for the most part unsuccessful, oft times fatal to them who use it. Sound doctrine diligently and duly taught is of herself both sufficient, and of herself (if some secret judgement of God hinder not) always prevalent against seducers' (27–28). Let Protestants, then, cease 'to importune and interrupt the magistrate from attending to his own charge in civil and moral things, the settling of things just, things honest . . . of all which things he hath enough and more than enough to do, left yet undone—for which the land groans and justice goes to wrack the while. . . . The conscience is not his province' (24).

The exercise of civil power in matters of religion does great wrong 'by violating the fundamental privilege of the Gospel, the new birthright of every true believer, Christian liberty.' This liberty, Milton explains, 'sets us free not only from the bondage of those ceremonies, but also from the forcible imposition of those circumstances, place and time in the worship of God' (28). Ceremonies and circumstances were commanded in the Mosaic law, but 'the best and learnedest reformed writers', on the Continent if not in England, have recognized that Christianity brought an end to such restraints.

> By what warrant then our opinions and practices herein are of late turned quite against all other Protestants, and that which is to them orthodoxal to us become scandalous and punishable by statute, I wish were once again better considered —if we mean not to proclaim a schism in this point from the best and most reformed churches abroad. They who would seem more knowing, confess that these things are indifferent, but for that very cause by the magistrate may be commanded—as if God of His special grace in the Gospel had to this end freed us from His own commandments in these things, that our freedom should subject us to a more grievous yoke, the commandments of men. [29–30]

Magistrates should 'meddle not rashly with Christian liberty, the birthright and outward testimony of our adoption, lest while they little think it—nay, think they do God service—they themselves . . . be found persecuting them who are freeborn of the spirit' (32).

Magistrates justify the use of force in religion by pretending that it is for the glory of God, the spiritual good of those forced, or 'the temporal punishment of their scandal to others'. But these reasons, declares Milton in his fourth and last argument, are obviously false. No one will say that God's glory 'ought to be promoted in religious things by unwarrantable means, much less by means contrary to what He hath commanded.' 'That outward force cannot tend to the good of him who is forced in religion is unquestionable, for in religion whatever we do under the Gospel we ought to be thereof persuaded without scruple, and are justified by the faith we have, not by the work we do' (33). As for 'the usual pretence that, although tender consciences shall be tolerated, yet scandals thereby given shall not be unpunished', it is a subtle contrivance enabling those 'who may be so minded, to take away by little and little that liberty which Christ and His gospel, not any magistrate, hath right to give'. 'To heal one conscience we must not wound another' (34). Moreover, 'if profane and licentious persons must not neglect the performance of religious and holy duties, it implies that such duties they can perform, which no Protestant will affirm. They who mean the outward performance may so explain it, and it will then appear yet more plainly that such performance of religious and holy duties, especially by profane and licentious persons, is a dishonouring rather than a worshipping of God, and not only by Him not required but detested . . . We read not that Christ ever exercised force but once, and that was to drive profane ones out of His temple, not to force them in' (35–36). The simple truth is that 'force neither instructs in religion nor begets repentance or amendment of life, but, on the contrary, hardness of heart, formality, hypocrisy' (37), and other evils.

'The settlement of religion', Milton concludes, 'belongs only to each particular church by persuasive and spiritual means within itself'; 'the defence only of the church belongs to the magistrate' (39). 'On these four scriptural reasons, as on a firm square, this truth, the right of Christian and evangelic liberty, will stand immovable' against all arguments. He hopes that the new Parliament will be convinced and take steps appropriate to their Christian duty. He hopes also that the simplicity of his demonstration will earn for it a wide audience: 'Pomp and ostentation of reading is admired among the vulgar, but doubtless in matters of religion he is learnedest who is plainest. The brevity I use, not exceeding a small manual, will not therefore, I suppose, be thought the less considerable, unless with them perhaps who think that great books only can determine great matters. I rather chose the common rule, not to make much ado where less may serve—which in controversies, and those especially of religion, would make them less tedious and by consequence read ofter, by many more, and with more benefit' (41). In a preface addressed to the Parliament he explains his motive in writing:

> I have prepared, supreme Council, against the much expected time of your sitting, this treatise, which, though to all Christian magistrates equally belonging, and therefore to have been written in the common language of Christendom [i.e., Latin], natural duty and affection hath confined and dedicated first to my own nation, and in a season wherein the timely reading thereof, to the easier accomplishment of your great work, may save you much labour and interruption . . . your power being but for a time, and having in yourselves a Christian liberty of your own which at one time or other may be oppressed, thereof truly sensible it will concern you while you are in power so to regard other men's consciences as you would your own should be regarded in the power of others . . . One advantage I make no doubt of, that I shall write to many eminent persons of your number already perfect and resolved in this important article of Christianity—some of whom I remember to have heard often for several years, at a Council next in authority to your own . . . [1–2]

He reminds the Parliament of his former services, and urges his right to speak with impunity on this new theme: 'Of civil liberty I have written heretofore by the appointment, and not without the approbation, of civil power; of Christian liberty I write now, which others long since having done with all freedom under heathen emperors, I should do wrong to suspect that I now shall with less under Christian governors, and such especially as profess openly their defence of Christian liberty—although I write this not otherwise appointed or induced than by an inward persuasion of the Christian duty which I may usefully discharge herein to the common Lord and Master of us all, and the certain hope of His approbation, first and chiefest to be sought' (2–3). He will pray for their successful defence 'of true religion and our civil rights'.

The *Treatise of Civil Power* was registered for publication on 16 February 1659, and was advertised in *The Publick Intelligencer* for 7–14 February as on sale in St. Paul's Churchyard, Fleet Street, and Westminster Hall.[77] Parliament had met on 27 January (with Milton's colleague, young Andrew Marvell, as a Member for Hull), and had promptly recognized Richard Cromwell as Oliver's rightful successor. It then became involved, however, in a prolonged debate in which an aggressive republican minority questioned the legitimacy of a House of Lords and even questioned the constitutional right of the Irish and Scottish members to be present in the Commons. On 16 March Milton's friend, Overton, was released after four years' imprisonment. On 28 March the Other House was recognized. Even after this victory for the Government there was no disposition to tackle the issues urged by Milton's pamphlet. It was apparent, in fact, that the heavy Presbyterian representation in the Commons were ready to deal severely with whatever they regarded as heresies, and to limit, not broaden, the Cromwellian policy of toleration. Milton's eloquent plea fell upon deaf or hostile ears. Not for the first time in his life he had tried to influence England's law-makers, and had accomplished exactly nothing. His argument seems not even to have been noticed in print.

The army, fearing neglect of their interests, increased their political activity. With Richard's incautious permission a convention of about five hundred officers met at Wallingford House, and on 6 April submitted to the Protector a 'Humble Representation and Petition', asking for a separation of civil and military power. After ignoring this move for more than a week, the Commons finally expressed open antagonism, and Richard tried vainly to dissolve the Wallingford House council. He was presented with an ultimatum by the emboldened officers, who suddenly called a great rendezvous of regiments as a reminder of their strength; and the unhappy Protector dissolved the Parliament instead, on 22 April. The doors of the Commons had to be padlocked and guarded to prevent the indignant members from reconvening.[78]

Meanwhile, Milton as a civil servant had been occasionally busied with diplomatic and other correspondence. On 27 January there were letters from Richard to Charles Gustavus of Sweden and to the States of West

Friesland;[79] in February there were two letters to Cardinal Mazarin,[80] one to Louis XIV,[81] and one to the King of Portugal.[82] (The last mentioned reveals Milton—and his government—guilty of incredible carelessness and diplomatic blundering. It was addressed to King John of Portugal, who had died on 6 November 1656 and had been succeeded by Alfonso VI. Milton's mind was obviously not on his business.) In April there were two letters to Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Tuscany,[83] another to Portugal (still addressed to a dead king, showing that the error had not been recognized),[84] and one to Sweden.[85] Late in April Milton dictated a personal letter to Jean Labadie, a French minister of Orange. This man, a former Jesuit converted to Protestantism, had some time earlier written an account of his vicissitudes in the cause of religion, and had particularly asked that it be read to Milton. Their mutual friend, (Giles?) Dury, had, however, been slow to bring it to Milton's attention. This had to be explained in the reply, which is lengthy and cordial. Milton was obviously impressed by the Frenchman's dramatic story, and was eager to aid so deserving a person. It was also gratifying that Labadie's friend, Pierre Du Moulin of Nîmes, had spoken so well of Milton (who had not yet heard, it would seem, of his death). The author of the *Defensio* against the famous Salmasius was aware of his European celebrity, but the only real fame he could claim, he declared, was the esteem of good men. The tale of Labadie's sufferings was assurance that he was of a like mind. God's care of Labadie might even be manifest in the fact that his message was delayed in transit, for Milton was now able to tell him that his desire to find a refuge in England could be realized. On 25 April Jean d'Espagne, minister of the Somerset House Chapel, had died at the age of sixty-eight, and Milton was commissioned to invite Labadie to succeed him. The expenses of his journey would be defrayed, and he would enter as good a living as that of any French minister in England. Milton advised him to come at once.[86]

Labadie never came, but that is another story. We must return to affairs in England, where a catchword, combined with an urgent need for funds, determined the army's next move in national politics. There had to be a Parliament of some sort, and popular talk of 'the Good Old Cause' provided the solution. Oliver was dead; his extraordinary personality had brought an interruption of normal government, an interruption not to be perpetuated; and so Englishmen began to yearn for the old Commonwealth, the republican constitution that had flourished from the time of Charles's death until Oliver's dissolution of the Rump Parliament in 1653. A restoration of the Rump would restore continuity if anything could. 'The Good Old Cause' was worth reviving. On 7 May, therefore, a small number of Rumpers were rounded up, and encouraged by the unexpected sentiment, they boldly voted their intention of governing 'without a single person, kingship, or House of Peers'.

Milton was elated. As he wrote to a friend some months later: 'I was overjoyed when I heard that the Army, under the working of God's Holy Spirit as I thought (and still hope well), had been so far wrought to Christian humility and self-denial as to confess in public their backsliding from the Good Old Cause, and to show the fruits of their repentance in the righteousness of their restoring the old famous Parliament which they had without just authority dissolved. I call it the famous Parliament, though not the harmless, since none well-affected but will confess they have deserved much more of these nations than they have undeserved' (VI. 101–2). Six days after its revival the Rump pleased the army by appointing Fleetwood commander-in-chief in England and Scotland. At the same time it agreed on the formation of an executive Council of State. Milton was continued, of course, as one of the Latin secretaries, and on 15 May he translated letters to the kings of Sweden and Denmark announcing the restoration of power in the Parliament.[87] Ten days later the Rump accepted Richard Cromwell's abdication.

So far as we know, Milton prepared no further letters of state for his government, and his active work as a public official was ended. But he continued on the payroll, and he was once again optimistic as the Rump went courageously about its business. There was no doubting the attitude of this Parliament towards religious toleration, and there was even hope that it would abolish the whole system of tithes which Cromwell had retained as a prop to his Established Ministry. Five days before the Rump had held its first meeting, Milton's *Treatise of Civil Power* had headed a list of books advertised for sale in the *Publick Intelligencer*, and its author felt, no doubt, that finally it might achieve its purpose.[88] Moreover, the *Treatise* had begun with this statement: 'Two things there be which have been ever found working much mischief to the Church of God and the advancement of truth: force on the one side restraining, and hire on the other side corrupting the teachers thereof. . . . The former shall be at this time my argument; the latter as I shall find God disposing me and opportunity inviting' (VI. 4). Opportunity was certainly inviting now.

A friend, Moses Wall, in a letter written on 26 May, urged him not to delay in bringing out the book on hire. Milton had recently corresponded with Wall, perhaps sending him a copy of the *Treatise of Civil Power*, but certainly complaining of 'the non-progressency of the nation, and of its retrograde motion of late in liberty and spiritual truths'. Wall's reply was very frank. Although he had greatly respected Milton for his friendliness to truth in his 'early years and in bad times', he had feared that the Latin Secretary's relation to Cromwell's court had clouded his 'former light'. 'But your last book resolved that doubt', he confessed. 'I think that a Commonwealth was more friendly to you than a Court.' As for the state of the nation, Wall was inclined to blame England's frail leaders instead of the people: 'When those who made deep protestations of their zeal for our liberty, both spiritual and civil, and made the fairest offers to be assertors thereof, and whom we thereupon trusted—when those, being instated in power, shall betray the good thing committed to them, and lead us back to Egypt, and by that force which we gave them to win us liberty hold us fast in chains—what can poor people do?' He was contemptuous of military interference in politics, and felt that the first steps to freedom should be sweeping *economic* reforms. A people enslaved by poverty, with spirits 'dejected and servile', cannot achieve political liberty. Let manufacture and trade be improved; let the 'cursed yoke of tithes' be broken; let the dead hand of feudalism be lifted from the nation's economy and an end brought to 'the tenure of lands by copyhold and holding for life under a lord (or rather tyrant) of a manor'. Still, liberty is God's work, not man's; 'let us not despond, but do our duty; God will carry on that blessed work in despite of all opposites—and to their ruin if they persist therein.' If Milton publishes a book against tithes, he will probably 'find opposers', but let him remember the words of the Apostle: 'We count them happy which endure.'[89]

Like Moses Wall, a great many people considered Church-disestablishment an important part of 'the Good Old Cause', and petitions for the abolition of tithes were being sent to the Parliament from many quarters. One such was read in the House on 14 June, and the petitioners were informed that the legislators must continue the system of tithes 'till they can find out some other more equal and comfortable maintenance for the ministry and satisfaction of the people, which they intend with all convenient speed'. That same day, by an extremely close vote, the question was referred to a Grand Committee. More petitions arrived, and on 27 June the House ordered to be printed and circulated a resolution to the effect that tithes must continue 'unless' the Parliament found a better system. The change in wording, from 'till' to 'unless', suggested that the Rump was wavering, and needed encouragement and advice. As Milton put it: 'The maintenance of church ministers, a thing not properly belonging to the magistrate and yet with such importunity called for and expected from him, is at present under public debate—wherein lest anything may happen to be determined and established prejudicial to the right and freedom of Church, or advantageous to such as may be found hirelings therein, it will be now most seasonable, and in these matters wherein every Christian hath his free suffrage no way misbecoming Christian meekness, to offer freely without disparagement to the wisest such advice as God shall incline him and enable him to propound.' The new problem was even more serious than the one discussed in *Of Civil Power*, 'for under force, though no thanks to the forcers, true religion oft times best thrives and flourishes, but the corruption of teachers, most commonly the effect of hire, is the very bane of truth in them who are so corrupted'.[90]

Milton's opinions on the subject were definite and drastic. He wanted genuine reform from the Parliament which, he trusted, had been 'restored for a happier reformation' (67). He did not consider his views, based so solidly on Scripture and Scripture alone, as visionary and impractical, unless Christianity itself were visionary and impractical. Legislators professing Christianity must be brought to realize that 'no maintenance of ministers, whether tithes or any other, can be settled by statute, but must be given by them who receive instruction, and freely given, as God hath ordained' (90). This was the whole point; this was the inescapable, if uncomfortable, truth. Anything less, any compromise, was unchristian. Milton was not such a fool as to believe that hirelings could be completely eliminated from the Church; the practical, Christian problem was to reduce their numbers. That a recompense ought to be given ministers, 'and may by them justly be received, our Saviour Himself from the very light of reason and of equity hath declared' (50). Therefore, 'hire of itself is neither a thing unlawful nor a word of any evil note, signifying no more than a due recompense . . . That which makes it so dangerous in the Church, and properly makes the *hireling* a word always of evil signification, is either the excess thereof or the undue manner of giving and taking it' (48). Obviously the questions to be asked, and answered from Scripture, were these three: what recompense for ministry has God ordained, by whom should it be given, and in what manner? Milton decided to organize his new book on this basis.

He first dictated many pages in an attempt to demonstrate that the Old Testament system of tithes, as payment for 'the Levitical and ceremonial service of the tabernacle' (51), had been abolished under the Gospel, along with the ceremonies. In the course of this demonstration he analysed the relevant passages in Scripture and also the chief arguments advanced by the advocates of tithes, pointing out that his conclusions were 'so apparent to the reformed divines of other countries that when any one of ours hath attempted in Latin to maintain this argument of tithes, though a man would think they might suffer him without opposition in a point equally tending to the advantage of all ministers, yet they forbear not to oppose him, as in a doctrine not fit to pass unopposed under the Gospel' (60–61). Any form of state maintenance of the clergy is inconsistent with Christian liberty, for it must be remembered 'that it concerns every man's conscience to what religion he contributes, and that the civil magistrate is entrusted with civil rights only, not with conscience' (84). Even fees for christenings, marriages, and burials should be purely voluntary; 'if they be exacted or established, they become unjust to them who are otherwise maintained'; 'for if the minister be maintained for his whole ministry, why should he be twice paid for any part thereof?' (70–71). God has ordained for clergymen 'a due and moderate livelihood' (73), thus recognizing 'the plain and common equity of rewarding the labourer' (62).

By whom should this recompense be given? It is 'most natural, most equal and agreeable with Scripture' (85), that ministers should be maintained by those whom they actually instruct, either through individual offerings, 'or by them all in common, brought into the church-treasury and distributed to the ministers according to their several labours' (73). That the magistrate, 'either out of that Church revenue which remains yet in his hand, or establishing any other maintenance instead of tithe, should take into his power the stipendiary maintenance of church ministers, or compel it by law, can stand neither with the people's right nor with Christian liberty, but would suspend the Church wholly upon the state, and turn her ministers into state-pensioners. And for the magistrate in person of a nursing father to make the Church his mere ward, . . . her to subject to his political drifts or conceived opinions by mastering her revenue, and so by his examinant committees to circumscribe her free election of ministers, is neither just nor pious' (82–83). 'What if they who are to be instructed be not able to maintain a minister, as in many villages?' In considering this practical problem we should remember that the Bible is 'in main matters of belief and salvation plain and easy to the poorest, and such, no less than their teachers, have the Spirit to guide them in all truth. . . . certainly it is not necessary to the attainment of Christian knowledge that men should sit all their life long at the feet of a pulpited divine' (75). Such spiritual instruction as rural communities need can be supplied by itinerant missions maintained by 'the charity of richer congregations', and a year or two of preaching

> may suffice to teach them, who will attend and learn, all the points of religion necessary to salvation; then, sorting them into several congregations of a moderate number, out of the ablest and zealousest among them to create Elders, who, exercising and requiring from themselves what they have learned (for no learning is retained without constant exercise and methodical repetition), may teach and govern the rest . . . Thus taught once for all, and thus now and then visited and confirmed, in the most destitute and poorest places of the land, under the government of their own Elders performing all ministerial offices among them, they may be trusted to meet and edify one another whether in church or chapel, or, to save them the trudging of many miles thither, nearer home, though in a house or barn. For notwithstanding the gaudy superstition of some devoted still ignorantly to temples, we may be well assured that He who disdained not to be laid in a manger, disdains not to be preached in a barn . . . [77–79]

If churches cannot afford to support these missions, then appeals can be made to the trustees of charitable funds. In any case, 'this expense would be much less than to hire incumbents, or rather incumbrances, for lifetime' (79). Moreover, the plan 'can discourage none but hirelings, and will much lessen their number in the Church' (85).

'Lastly, to consider in what manner God hath ordained that recompense be given to ministers of the Gospel, . . . by all Scripture it will appear that He hath given it them, not by civil law and freehold, as they claim, but by the benevolence and free gratitude of such as receive them' (85). The manner should be purely voluntary—alms, not a life-endowment, and certainly not a legal contract that can be dragged into court when unfulfilled. As for the number of people who would make such freewill offerings, the answer, to Milton, was plain enough: 'as many, doubtless, as shall be well taught; as many as God shall so move' (90). Why should ministers, of all people, be distrustful both of their own doctrine and of God's promises?

This, in brief, was the argument which Milton prepared to publish and address to Parliament. He tried to make his proposals practical, but he did not try to conceal his own idealism, his Christian contempt for those who regarded Christ's teachings as impractical. After all, there would be no hirelings, and no problem, 'if ministers of their own accord, who pretend that they are called and sent to preach the Gospel, those especially who have no particular flock, would imitate our Saviour and His disciples who went preaching through the villages, not only through the cities, . . . looking for no recompense but in Heaven . . . if they have not the same faith which those disciples had to trust in God and the promise of Christ for their maintenance as they did, and yet intrude into the ministry without any livelihood of their own, they cast themselves into a miserable hazard or temptation, and oft times into a more miserable necessity, either to starve or to please their paymasters rather than God' (76–77). Ideally, it would be better for religion if teaching were never bought or sold, if it were uncontaminated by money, the state's or the congregation's. The ideal religious teacher was one who supported himself, either from private resources or from some other occupation. Church endowments and possessions brought evil; church revenues constituted always 'an apple of discord . . . for what else can be the effect of riches and the snare of money in religion?' (84). It was symptomatic of the decline of true spirituality that 'our ministers think scorn to use a trade, and count it the reproach of this age that tradesmen preach the Gospel. It were to be wished they were *all* tradesmen; they would not then so many of them, for want of another trade, make a trade of their preaching' (81).

Milton still believed with all his heart in a lay-ministry. 'The Gospel makes no difference from the magistrate himself to the meanest artificer, if God evidently favour him with spiritual gifts, as He can easily and oft hath done while those bachelor divines and doctors of the tippet have been passed by' (98). The faithful among laymen have 'their spiritual priesthood, whereby they have all equally access to any ministerial function whenever called by their own abilities and the Church, though they never came near Commencement or university.' So persuaded, Milton heaped contempt upon the professional clergy, calling them 'a numerous faction of indigent persons, crept for the most part out of extreme want and bad nurture, claiming by divine right and freehold the tenth of our estates, to monopolize the ministry as their peculiar, which is free and open to all able Christians elected by any church' (99). He found it hateful and hypocritical

> that they who have preached out bishops, prelates, and canonists should, in what serves their own ends, retain their false opinions, their Pharisaical leaven, their avarice and closely their ambition, their pluralities, their non residences, their odious fees, and use their legal and popish arguments for tithes; that Independents should take that name, as they may justly from the true freedom of Christian doctrine and Church discipline subject to no superior judge but God only, and seek to be Dependents on the magistrate for their maintenance—which two things, independence and state-hire in religion, can never consist long or certainly together. For magistrates at one time or other—not like these at present our patrons of Christian liberty—will pay none but such whom by their committees of examination they find conformable to their interest and opinions . . . [96]

Presbyterians and Independents alike had become a hireling crew. The situation was so bad that 'now commonly he who desires to be a minister looks not at the work but at the wages' (93).

After a lifelong study of both sacred and profane authors, Milton had come to the conclusion that the Bible alone, *unassisted by learning*, was a sufficient guide to all essential religious truths. The study of Scripture, he decided, 'is the only true theology' (80). The citation of Church Fathers in a religious question, 'whereof the Scripture only is our rule, argues not much learning nor judgement, but the lost labour of much unprofitable reading' (65). Furthermore, God 'through the whole Gospel never sent us for ministers to the schools of Philosophy, but rather bids us beware of such "vain deceit" ' (98).[91] 'It is a fond error, though too much believed among us, to think that the university makes a minister of the Gospel' (93), for 'what learning, either human or divine, can be necessary to a minister, may as easily and less chargeably be had in any private house' (94). '. . . to speak freely, it were much better there were not one divine in the university, no school-divinity known (the idle sophistry of monks, the canker of religion), and that they who intended to be ministers were trained up in the church only, by the Scripture and in the original languages thereof at school, without fetching the compass of other arts and sciences more than what they can well learn at secondary leisure and at home' (96). Books were no problem; the necessary ones are all available in English, and a minister's 'needful library', Milton calculated, 'may be competently furnished for £60. If any man for his own curiosity or delight be in books further expensive, that is not to be reckoned as necessary to his ministerial either breeding or function' (95). As for helps 'to make more easy the attainment of Christian religion by the meanest', Milton (perhaps thinking of his own treatise on Christian doctrine in a convenient English translation) declared: 'and somewhere or other, I trust, may be found some wholesome body of divinity, as they call it, without school terms and metaphysical notions, which have obscured rather than explained our religion, and made it seem difficult without cause' (78).

Remembering his own experiences, Milton was unimpressed by ministers who pretended 'that their education either at school or university hath been very chargeable, and therefore ought to be repaired in future by a plentiful maintenance'.

> It is well known that the better half of them, and oft times poor and pitiful boys of no merit or promising hopes that might entitle them to the public provision but their poverty and the unjust favour of friends, have had the most of their breeding both at school and university by scholarships, exhibitions, and fellowships at the public cost, which might engage them the rather to give freely, as they have freely received. Or if they have missed of these helps at the latter place, they have after two or three years left the course of their studies there, if they ever well began them, and undertaken, though furnished with little else but ignorance, boldness, and ambition (if with no worse vices), a chaplainship in some gentleman's house, to the frequent embasing of his sons with illiterate and narrow principles. Or if they have lived there upon their own, who knows not that seven years' charge of living there, to them who fly not from the government of their parents to the licence of a university, but come seriously to study, is no more than may be well defrayed and reimbursed by one year's revenue of an ordinary good benefice? [91–92]

Milton insisted, however, that a university education, while it was usually inexpensive, constituted no necessary training for the ministry. 'Let the state but erect in public good store of libraries' (95), and clergymen could teach themselves, even to become effective controversialists against papists. Better still, let public funds be used

> to erect in greater number all over the land schools, and competent libraries to those schools, where languages and arts may be taught free together, without the needless, unprofitable, and inconvenient removing to another place. So all the land would be soon better civilized; and they who are taught freely at the public cost might have their education given them on this condition, that, therewith content, they should not gad for preferment out of their own country, but continue there thankful for what they received freely, bestowing it as freely on their country, without soaring above the meanness wherein they were born. . . . those public foundations may be so instituted as the youth therein may be at once brought up to a competence of learning and to an honest trade; and the hours of teaching so ordered as their study may be no hindrance to their labour or other calling. [80]

These proposals—for the establishment of public libraries and of free schools where education might be combined with learning a trade—Milton advanced with hopeful seriousness in the name of 'the Good Old Cause' of full reformation.

In addition to these provocative (some would say farsighted) ideas on the training of ministers, there are a good many incidental or peripheral comments of interest to the student of Milton's opinions. 'Marginal Prynne', for example, is mentioned again, and disposed of in a single, sarcastic sentence (66). Other sentences mark the first publication of convictions he had clarified and organized in his treatise on Christian doctrine. The magical 'tenth' of tithing he rejects in a comparison that also sweepingly denies the common conception of the Sabbath: 'As therefore the seventh day is not moral, but a convenient recourse of worship in fit season (whether seven or other number), so neither is the tenth of our goods, but only a convenient subsistence morally due to ministers' (67). Burials and marriages, far from being a legitimate source of income for the clergy, are not even 'part of their function' (71) in Milton's view. 'As for marriages, that ministers should meddle with them . . . I find no ground in Scripture either of precept or example' (72). He voices approval of the recent law that 'recovered the civil liberty of marriage from their encroachment, and transferred the ratifying and registering thereof from the canonical shop to the proper cognizance of civil magistrates' (73). His own second marriage, it will be remembered, had been thus clergy-freed.

As he dictated his various arguments, getting the book ready for publication, the Parliament which was symbolic of 'the Good Old Cause' shifted its attention from the problem of tithes and hirelings to other, more pressing issues. The Rumpers decided early that it would be wise to remodel the army which had brought them to power, giving new commissions to all officers and, not incidentally, asserting the authority of Parliament. Then, during July, there was the beginning of a lively demand for a new republican constitution, a concern destined to grow in complexity as the months passed. London was teeming with political theorists eager to help. One of these, James Harrington, author of the *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) and *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658), drew up a petition which was submitted to the House on 6 July. Early in August rumours flew of a general Royalist insurrection. The affair was bungled, and only in Cheshire, under the leadership of Sir George Booth, did many rise in arms. They were easily crushed by Lambert, and 'such a signal victory' when 'so great a part of the nation were desperately conspired to call back again their Egyptian bondage' convinced Milton 'that God was pleased' with the restoration of the Rump. There were, of course, a great many arrests and reprisals, and the House, with or without God's pleasure, began enthusiastically to settle some old scores.[92]

Milton's *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* was published in August 1659, probably near the end of the month. It was advertised for sale in *Mercurius Politicus* for 1–8 September.[93] In his preface to the Parliament, Milton professed to have no doubt, 'seeing daily the acceptance which they find who in their petitions venture to bring advice also and new models of a commonwealth, but that you will interpret it much more the duty of a Christian to offer what his conscience persuades him may be of moment to the freedom and better constituting of the Church' (44–45). Obviously worried about the shift in Parliament's interest, he warned that until religion is 'set free from the monopoly of hirelings', 'no model whatsoever of a commonwealth will prove successful or undisturbed' (45). He also made a frank plea for consideration of his views on the basis of his former service to this same body of legislators:

> Owing to your protection, supreme senate, this liberty of writing which I have used these eighteen years on all occasions to assert the just rights and freedoms both of Church and state—and so far approved as to have been trusted with the representment and defence of your actions to all Christendom against an adversary of no mean repute—to whom should I address what I still publish on the same argument but to you whose magnanimous counsels first opened and unbound the age from a double bondage under prelatical and regal tyranny, above our own hopes heartening us to look up at last like men and Christians from the slavish dejection wherein from father to son we were bred up and taught; and thereby deserving of these nations, if they be not barbarously ingrateful, to be acknowledged, next under God, the authors and best patrons of religious and civil liberty that ever these islands brought forth—the care and tuition of whose peace and safety, after a short but scandalous night of interruption, is now again, by a new dawning of God's miraculous providence among us, revolved upon your shoulders? . . . That I, though among many others in this common concernment, interpose to your deliberations what my thoughts also are, your own judgement and the success thereof hath given me the confidence—which requests but this, that if I have prosperously (God so favouring me) defended the public cause of this Commonwealth to foreigners, ye would not think the reason and ability whereon ye trusted once, and repent not, your whole reputation to the world, either grown less by more maturity and longer study, or less available in English than in another tongue . . . [VI. 43–44]

These words constituted Milton's open adherence to the Rump as the 'authors, assertors, and now recoverers of our liberty' (45). Of all possible Parliaments, they were the most likely to achieve a more thorough reformation. But Milton ended his book with a grim admonition: if they failed, 'infinite disturbances in the state' must needs follow. 'If I be not heard nor believed', he warned solemnly, 'the event will bear me witness to have spoken truth; and I in the meanwhile have borne my witness, not out of season, to the Church and to my country' (100).

'Infinite disturbances in the state' came so quickly after the publication of Milton's prophecy that he himself was profoundly shocked. On 13 October a gang of army officers, with Lambert as the leading spirit, forcibly prevented the Parliament from continuing. The *coup d'état* threatened England with complete anarchy. Although the Rump had been steadily declining in prestige, the lawlessness of its dissolution and the dread of military dictatorship filled the people with panic. The trouble had started with the Rump's confident assumption of its own supreme authority and consequent failure to meet the expectations of its patron, the army. While it debated the form of a new commonwealth, and awaited a specific proposal from its special committee of twenty-nine, the army's grumbling increased. In many quarters there was less talk of 'the Good Old Cause', and more of the benefits enjoyed under single-person government. On 23 September the House discussed a petition received from officers in Lambert's army at Derby; it expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, and demanded a military hierarchy. On 5 October a similar petition was received from about 230 officers stationed in or near London. A letter urging additional officers to support this petition, and signed by Lambert, Desborough, and seven others, fell into the hands of the Parliament, which promptly, in a hasty gesture of authority, relieved all nine of their commissions. This was on 12 October. On the next day the army took matters into their own hands.[94]

Although Milton was disappointed in the Rump, 'as not complying fully to grant liberty of conscience and the necessary consequence thereof, the removal of a forced maintenance from ministers' (104–5), he was nevertheless amazed (as he wrote to a friend one week later)[95] that the army

> should now dissolve that Parliament which they themselves re-established and acknowledged for their supreme power . . . and all this for no apparent cause of public concernment to the church or Commonwealth, but only for discommissioning nine great officers in the army—which had not been done, as is reported, but upon notice of their intentions against the Parliament. I presume not to give my censure on this action, not knowing, as yet I do not, the bottom of it. I speak only what it appears to us within doors, till better cause be declared (and I am sure to all other nations): most illegal and scandalous, I fear me barbarous, or rather scarce to be exampled among any barbarians—that a paid army should, for no other cause, thus subdue the supreme power that set them up. This, I say, other nations will judge to the sad dishonour of that army lately so renowned for the civilest and best ordered in the world, and by us here at home for the most conscientious. [102–3]

Milton was shocked, disillusioned, and also frightened, for he feared that the army's infamous deed would 'undoubtedly pull down the heavy judgement of God among us, who cannot but avenge these hypocrisies, violations of truth and holiness—if they be indeed so as they yet seem' (103).

On the night of 19 October Milton talked with a friend 'concerning these dangerous ruptures of the Commonwealth', and they fell into a 'sad and serious discourse'. The friend was someone able to acquaint Milton 'with the state of affairs more inwardly' (101) than he had known before. Among other things they evidently discussed the identity of 'the secret author and fomenter of these disturbances' (106), the 'single person underneath' (105), the 'Achan' amongst the army officers 'whose close ambition in all likelihood abuses their honest natures' (103–4). In other words, they probably speculated as to the political aspirations of John Lambert. 'Stirred up' (101) by the disclosures of his friend, Milton developed some definite opinions about the remedies 'likeliest to save' England 'from approaching ruin' (104), and he was urged to put these opinions in writing, on the chance of being 'some way serviceable to the Commonwealth in a time when all ought to be endeavouring what good they can, whether much or but little' (106).

He did so, the very next day, in the form of a letter to this anonymous friend. The recent disorders, he said, threatened 'to bring in again the common enemy and, with him, the destruction of true religion and civil liberty' (104). He hoped that the army would be able to 'publish with all speed some better cause of these their late actions than hath hitherto appeared' (103). England was 'in anarchy, without a counselling and governing power', and the army, obviously, was 'insufficient to discharge at once both military and civil affairs'. Since no commonwealth can subsist without a senate or general council of state, one must 'be found out with all speed' (104).

> This must either be the Parliament readmitted to sit, or a Council of State allowed of by the army, since they only now have the power. The terms to be stood on are: liberty of conscience to all professing Scripture to be the rule of their faith and worship, and the abjuration of a single person. . . . That which I conceive only able to cement and unite forever the army, either to the Parliament recalled or this chosen Council, must be a mutual League and Oath, private or public, not to desert one another till death; that is to say, that the army be kept up and all these officers in their places during life, and so likewise the Parliament or Counsellors of State . . . unless any be found false to any of these two principles, or otherwise personally criminous in the judgement of both parties. If such a union as this be not accepted on the army's part, be confident there is a single person underneath. . . . And whether the civil government be an annual democracy, or a perpetual aristocracy, is not to me a consideration for the extremities wherein we are, and the hazard of our safety from our common enemy, gaping at present to devour us. That it be not an oligarchy, or the faction of a few, may be easily prevented by the numbers of their own choosing, who may be found infallibly constant to those two conditions forenamed, full liberty of conscience and the abjuration of monarchy proposed; and the well-ordered committees of their faithfullest adherents in every county may give this government the resemblance and effects of a perfect democracy. [104–6]

All other problems should be postponed; 'they may be considered in due time when we are past these pernicious pangs, in a hopeful way of health'. Milton was certain that unless the all-important question of a senate was quickly settled, 'one way or other', 'we instantly ruin or, at best, become the servants of one or other single person'. Such was the sum of his thoughts, and he informed his friend: 'With this you may do what you please: put out, put in, communicate or suppress; you offend not me, who only have obeyed your opinion that in doing what I have done, I might happen to offer something which might be of some use in this great time of need. However, I have not been wanting to the opportunity which you presented before me, of showing the readiness I have in the midst of my unfitness, to whatever may be required of me as a public duty' (106). The letter was dated 20 October 1659.

It was apparently not published. And we do not know what use, if any, Milton's friend made of it. But six days later a new supreme senate, a Committee of Safety so called, was created by the army officers at Wallingford House, and among its twenty-three members were some whom Milton himself would have chosen, men of experience and integrity. They were agreed, moreover, on government without a single person. On the other hand, the question of liberty of conscience was still undecided, and the Committee of Safety, regarding itself as a temporary body, began at once to debate the more urgent question of a new constitution for the Commonwealth. On 1 November the question was referred to a subcommittee consisting of Fleetwood, Vane, Whitelocke, Edmund Ludlow, Richard Salwey, and Robert Tichborne. Popular interest in the problem also revived. Since the beginning of the Michaelmas term a group of men had been meeting almost regularly at Miles's coffee-house for the discussion of this and similar questions. Their informal and ephemeral debating club was named 'the Rota', after the famous theory of its directing spirit, James Harrington.[96]

Besides Harrington himself, the following seem to have been regular participants in these lively meetings: Cyriack Skinner, Milton's devoted young friend; Henry Neville, political writer and member of the Rump; Dr. Robert Wood, physician and mathematician; Sir William Petty, political economist, who 'troubled Mr. James Harrington with his arithmetical proportions, reducing polity to numbers'; Sir John Wildman, politician, soldier, and writer; Sir Charles Wolseley, member of Parliament; Roger Coke, political writer; Sir William Poultney; Sir John Hoskins, barrister (later president of the Royal Society); James Arderne (later Dean of Chester, but then a young man just out of the university); Maximilian Petty, 'a very able man in these matters'; Major Thomas Venner; Michael Mallet; Philip Carteret; Francis Cradock, a merchant (later an admirer of Milton's verse); Sir Henry Ford (later Irish Secretary); Edward Bagshaw; Thomas Mariet; Richard Sackville, fifth Earl of Dorset; and Dr. William Croone, professor of rhetoric at Gresham College. Such stimulating company of course attracted auditors; among them, we know, were John Aubrey, Samuel Pepys, Sir John Birkenhead, Sir John Penruddock, and, probably, Andrew Marvell, who was an intimate friend of Harrington. Aubrey has left us an account of Harrington's club which helps to explain its fascination for Englishmen in 1659:

> he had every night a meeting at the (then) Turk's Head—in the new palace-yard, where they take water, the next house to the stairs, at one Miles's—where was

> made purposely a large oval table, with a passage in the middle for Miles to deliver his coffee. About it sat his disciples and the virtuosi. The discourses in this kind were the most ingenious and smart that ever I heard or expect to hear, and bandied with great eagerness. The arguments in the Parliament House were but flat to it. . . . Here we had (very formally) a balloting-box, and balloted how things should be carried, by way of tentamens. The room was every evening full as it could be crammed. . . . We many times adjourned to the Rhenish wine-house. . . . The doctrine was very taking, and the more because, as to human foresight, there was no possibility of the King's return. . . . Now this model upon Rotation was: that the third part of the Senate should rote out by ballot every year, so that every ninth year the House would be wholly altered; no magistrate to continue above three years, and all to be chosen by ballot, than which manner of choice nothing can be invented more fair and impartial. Well, this meeting continued . . . till 20 or 21 February [i.e., 1660], and then, upon the unexpected turn upon General Monk's coming in, all these airy models vanished. Then 'twas not fit, nay treason, to have done such . . .

In November and December of 1659 the Rota was most active, hoping to influence the Committee of Safety in its momentous decisions.[97]

Although Milton seems to have attended no meeting of the Rota (his blindness and the late evening sessions probably forbidding), he was certainly aware of the theories advanced by its members, and he continued to feel a personal responsibility in regard to the common problem. He hoped that the Committee of Safety would 'hasten as much as may be the settling of some firm and durable government', since the 'continual changes' made England the scorn of foreign nations and rendered her helpless to resist the 'speedy invasion' rumoured in preparation by France and Spain. In his opinion, 'the only prevention' of immediate civil war and complete disaster was to restore the Rump Parliament as a permanent senate, its members to 'retain their places during life unless by particular faults they deserve removal'—but making them first agree to 'an Act of Oblivion for what is past between them and the army', and making 'the main conditions' of their tenure 'full liberty of conscience to all who profess their faith and worship by the Scriptures only, and against single government by any one person-in-chief and House of Lords'.[98]

It was probably in November that Milton dictated to his amanuensis these and other 'Proposals of Certain Expedients for the Preventing of a Civil War Now Feared, and the Settling of a Firm Government'.[99] What he did with this document is not known. Like the earlier 'Letter', it may have been requested by some friend. Or he may have submitted it directly to his employers, the Committee of Safety. The retiring Council of State had issued a warrant for payment of his salary on 25 October, and there is nothing in the surviving records of the Committee of Safety which suggests that he and Marvell were discharged from their posts.[100]

Milton's ten 'Proposals' represent his attempt to salvage and re-emphasize what he regarded as the most important among various suggestions he had already advanced. As in the earlier 'Letter to a Friend', he advocates that both army officers and members of the supreme senate be given life tenure, and that all be bound to guarantee freedom of conscience and to abjure a single person and House of Lords. As in the books on *Civil Power* and *Hirelings*, he advocates that the Parliament leave 'both maintenance of ministers and all matters ecclesiastical to the Church in her several congregations'. The 'Proposals' modify some of his previous views and add some new ideas. He now pleads unequivocally for the restoration of the Rump, instead of presenting this move as an alternative to a Council chosen by the army. He also pleads that the army, 'from the highest to the lowest soldier of them, take an oath of obedience to the supreme authority, unless that fall off from the two main principles above named, liberty of conscience and the other against a single person and House of Lords.' His disagreement with the theories of the Rota-men is persistent in his argument that legislators should have life-tenure: 'the senate being the basis and foundation of government, which cannot be movable without great danger to the whole building, and especially in this Commonwealth and in our condition not without just fear of novelties and commotions upon every change of parliament.' Vacancies in the permanent Parliament may be filled by having persons 'nominated by the grand council and elected by the well-affected people, or nominated by those of the people and elected by the grand council'; Milton does not say which plan he approves; he only insists that the new members should subscribe to 'the two qualifications above named'.[101]

One of his new ideas concerns a semantic problem:

> because the name of 'parliament' is a Norman or French word, a monument of our ancient servitude, commonly held to consist necessarily of three estates—King, Lords, and Commons, and the two latter to be called by the King to parley with him about the great affairs of his realm—it might be very agreeable with our freedom to change the name of parliament (especially now having outlived its honour by so many dissolutions) into the name of a Grand or Supreme Council . . .

Another new idea concerns the administration of civil justice. This, he suggests, 'may be in the city or chief town of every county without appeal, judges and all such officers by themselves chosen, whereby they shall have no cause to clamour against the Supreme Council, nor can hope for more equal justice in any other place. As for those of several counties who have causes and suits, there may be still a common judicature, as there is here, in the capital city.' As to the qualifications of all the present Rumpers for life-tenure, Milton concedes that 'it may perhaps be thought requisite' to dismiss and replace those 'generally known and judged insufficient'—'but this is not urged, lest it be misinterpreted.' He is certain, however, that the Supreme Council should 'choose out of their own number and to them, if it be thought fit, some others also of eminent ability, to be a Council of State, with the same power which it had under the Parliament'. In all Milton's 'Proposals' the point that receives most emphasis is the fundamental one that England should commit herself indissolubly to the principles of liberty of conscience, no single person, and no House of Lords. He insists that everyone—from the members of the Supreme Council to the ordinary citizens who want to be considered 'well affected'—be bound by oath to these principles, 'without which we are like to fall into evils and discords incurable, the speedy end whereof will be utter ruin—which God of His mercy prevent!'[102]

But as the weeks passed, England became more and more demoralized. George Monk, heading the army in Scotland, had declared for the authority of the Rump, and it was daily expected that he would attempt an invasion to enforce his opinion. Everyone knew that Royalist sympathy had increased immeasurably, and everyone suspected his neighbour of secretly espousing the obvious alternative to constant change and confusion. In London there was continued discussion of a new republican constitution, but it was also rumoured that men in high places were negotiating with Charles II. The army chiefs, by producing chaos, had sacrificed their personal prestige, and even the soldiers were growing rebellious. The almost universal mood of hesitation and uncertainty soon found personification in Monk, who, quite inexplicably, remained in Scotland, poised for dubious battle. Was 'Silent Old George' really for the Rump, or for the King? The question was still a lively one on 26 December, when, for the second time, the Rump was restored to power.[103]

One leading republican was never to see the heartbreaking end to all these bewildering changes: John Bradshaw died on 31 October, and was buried in Westminster Abbey on 22 November. He had been grateful for Milton's stately praise of him in the *Defensio Secunda*; indeed, he had added a codicil to his will on 10 September 1655, leaving both Milton and Marchamont Needham legacies of £10 each. The sum was small, but it was a meaningful token of appreciation.[104] Like the anonymous author of *A Light Shining out of Darkness*, Bradshaw could speak of 'the excellent Mr. J. Milton'.[105] A broadside published in London on or before 9 November actually linked the Latin Secretary and the former president of the High Court of Justice, but in a very different tone. *A Guild-Hall Elegie, upon the Funerals of that Infernal Saint Iohn Bradshaw* contained the following couplet:

> His Justice was as blind as his friend Milton
> Who slandered the King's Book with an ill tongue.[106]

Earlier in the year William Prynne had named Milton in two different pamphlets as one of the literary 'Instruments' of the execrable regicides.[107]

To Richard Watson he was a 'desperado', whose plea for liberty of the press in *Areopagitica* had conveniently been forgotten by Cromwell and the Parliament.[108] If Milton were ever told of these attacks, he might have preferred them to the dangerously respectful allusion to 'learned Milton' in *Killing No Murder*, one of the most highly inflammatory pamphlets of the whole period.[109]

He had been eager to be remembered; he had even risked impropriety in his efforts to remind the public of his former services; but he was soon to recall that his blindness, in the popular imagination, was a proof of God's displeasure—a dramatic forewarning of the punishment that would befall many offenders. He had proudly republished his great *Defensio*, and now, a little over a year later, he learned that the posthumous reply of Salmasius was at long last about to be printed, at Dijon. On 2/12 December Henry Oldenburg sent him this unwelcome news from Paris.[110] There was nothing to be done, of course, until the book actually appeared, although it was obvious that the design to publish it was an attempt, at Milton's expense, to speed the rising tide of Royalist sympathy. Very well, if God prompted him to play Canute, he would essay the role! On 20 December he wrote Oldenburg: 'Be good enough to give me the earliest information of my posthumous adversary, as soon as he makes his appearance.'

He dictated letters to Oldenburg and young Jones on the same day. Since he had not heard from either in a long while, there were the usual apologies from both to acknowledge politely. Jones, in his last letter, had written of his great gratitude to Milton, who replied that the most acceptable repayment would be the young man's continued good conduct. Oldenburg, in addition to the news of Salmasius, had reported a meeting of the French Protestant Synod at Loudun, part of whose business was to consider the fitness of Alexander Morus to be a minister of the church of Charenton. Milton's attitude toward this familiar news was severe: if they did nothing else but decree the expulsion of Morus, this synod, unlike preceding ones, would have a happy issue. As for Oldenburg's suggestion that he compose a history of England's political troubles (perhaps in anticipation of the Salmasian *Responsio*), Milton declared that he had no such intention: 'for they merit silence rather than publishing abroad. We need, not someone to write a history of them, but someone able to settle successfully these troubles themselves. I too fear that this civil discord—or, rather, madness—will leave us too much at the mercy of the lately confederated enemies of liberty and religion, although, in truth, they can inflict no deeper wound upon religion than we ourselves have already inflicted by our wickedness.' He hoped that God, with His own glory at stake, would frustrate the plots of cardinals and kings.[111]

Milton, at fifty-one, felt no desire to put on paper the story of

England's miseries, but on 1 January 1660 Samuel Pepys, soon to be twenty-seven, began a diary with an account of 'the condition of the state':

> . . . the Rump, after being disturbed by my Lord Lambert, was lately returned to sit again. The officers of the Army all forced to yield. Lawson lies still in the river, and Monk is with his army in Scotland. Only my Lord Lambert is not yet come into the Parliament, nor is it expected that he will, without being forced to it. The new Common Council of the City do speak very high; and had sent to Monk their sword-bearer, to acquaint him with their desires for a free and full Parliament, which is at present the desires, and the hopes, and expectation of all. Twenty-two of the old secluded members have been at the House door the last week to demand entrance, but it was denied them; and it is believed that [neither] they nor the people will be satisfied till the House be filled.

Monk was the man of the hour. His influence doubled by calculated ambiguity, he began, in January, a slow march from Scotland to London. On the eighteenth, Pepys noted in his diary: 'All the world is at a loss to think what Monk will do: the City saying that he will be for them, and the Parliament saying he will be for them.' The Rump went about its business cautiously but stubbornly; it was more jealous than ever of its authority, and yet a conservative tendency was apparent: there was little talk, now, of 'the Good Old Cause'. On 3 February, a day of welcome sunshine, Monk arrived at Westminster. On 4 February the Rump announced its intention of filling up the House, not with the members secluded from the original Long Parliament, but in its own way.

Londoners were indignant, and there were riots in the streets. Ordered by the Rump Council to subdue the city with his regiments, Monk did so. Exulting at his adherence, the Rumpers went to extremes in demonstrating their power. Then, abruptly, 'Silent Old George' shifted his course. On 11 February he delivered an ultimatum to the Rump, dined with the Lord Mayor of London, and frankly sought reconciliation with the citizens. Pepys noted in his diary: 'It was very strange how the countenance of men in the Hall was all changed with joy in half an hour's time.' That day he had heard 'such a shout I never heard in all my life, crying out, "God bless your Excellence!"' And that night: 'Bow bells and all the bells in all the churches as we went home were a-ringing. . . . the common joy that was everywhere to be seen! The number of bonfires, there being fourteen between St. Dunstan's and Temple Bar, and at Strand Bridge I could at one view tell thirty-one fires. In King Street seven or eight; and all along burning, and roasting, and drinking for rumps. There being rumps tied upon sticks and carried up and down. . . . Indeed it was past imagination, both the greatness and the suddenness of it.' It was the celebration to be remembered for a long time as 'the Roasting of the Rump'. Monk was a hero, and the future of England depended upon his next moves.[112]

Meanwhile, with events happening more swiftly than he could compose, Milton had been hard at work on a tract which should demonstrate *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, and the Excellence thereof Compared with the Inconveniences and Dangers of Readmitting Kingship in This Nation.* Resilient as ever, determined to do all in his power to solve the major problem of the day, he had dropped everything else and devoted his energies to a last-ditch stand against the forces of reaction. The drift of popular feeling had been plain and ominous. His hope was to arrest this drift by coming forward, before it was too late, with a simple proposal that assured stability, and with eloquent reminders of the lessons taught by the recent past.

The pamphlet Milton was composing was not a statement of reasoned political theory—not even a plan its author would have defended at another time—but a hurried mixture of really desperate expediency and the minimum of principles that could not, must not, be sacrificed. He was frankly unconcerned, therefore, about the practical details of his proposal, for, as he said, 'there will want at no time [men] who are good at circumstances; but men who set their minds on main matters and sufficiently urge them in these most difficult times, I find not many.'[113] The basic problem was not to elaborate and argue the pattern of an acceptable constitution; it was to save England from disaster. And England's crying need was not this or that further experiment in politics; it was stability. Milton was writing in a moment of extreme crisis, and what he thought to propose was a step which, in point of fact, could have been easily and quickly taken. If the Rump had retained its fleeting popularity, if Monk had chosen to support the Rump, Milton's scheme might also have been acceptable—and it might have worked. But hindsight confers no privilege to contemn a man who, labouring in darkness and seclusion, tried to save his country, and failed for lack of perception.

Milton rightly knew that little time remained for any solution, and that a complicated proposal, therefore, was foredoomed. Hence the emphasis of his title: 'the ready and easy way'; and hence his tone of urgent optimism throughout the pamphlet: 'Now is the opportunity, now the very season, wherein we may obtain a free Commonwealth and establish it for ever in the land, without difficulty or much delay' (125). 'The way propounded is plain, easy, and open before us, without intricacies, without the mixture of inconveniences or any considerable objection to be made (as by some frivolously) that it is not practicable' (133/364). 'Few words will save us, well considered; few and easy things, now seasonably done' (147). 'A great number', Milton professed to believe, were still opposed to monarchy, 'and reserved, I trust, by divine providence to a better end, since God hath yet His remnant, and hath not yet quenched the spirit of liberty among us' (123/361). 'A few main matters now put speedily into execution will suffice to recover us, and set all right' (148). These utterances were not naïve; they were shrewd attempts to overcome the defeatist spirit that had paralysed the nation's will to act. Milton was not whistling in the dark; he was calling whipped dogs away from worse danger.

His plan was simplicity itself. It was, in essence, what he had twice proposed earlier in unpublished documents—restore stability by perpetuating the Government. He no longer advocated life tenure for army officers; they had eliminated themselves from consideration by much bungling. But he advocated permanence for the Rump, and the filling up of its ranks with able men, also elected for life. He again suggested changing the name of Parliament, to 'Grand' or 'General Council'. Realizing that the idea of a permanent national government would seem a threat to civil liberties, and no longer suggesting the name 'Supreme Council' for Parliament, he recommended what he hoped would be a popular safeguard: an elaboration of one of his earlier 'Proposals' that each county enjoy autonomous administration of civil justice. Implicit in the entire 'ready and easy way', of course, was one of his two basic principles: no Single Person. The second basic principle, a guarantee of freedom of conscience, he no longer insisted upon as an absolute condition; and more than anything actually said in the pamphlet, this omission reveals Milton's desperation. He continued to plead for freedom of conscience, but above all else he sought an end to political uncertainty and confusion.

Most of his pamphlet, appropriately, was devoted to arguing the advantages of a free Commonwealth over any government by a Single Person. This was the fundamental issue, and Milton used all his powers of persuasion to show that

> people must needs be mad or strangely infatuated that build the chief hope of their common happiness or safety on a single person, who, if he happen to be good, can do no more than another man; if to be bad, hath in his hands to do more evil without check than millions of other men. The happiness of a nation must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Council of their own electing, where no single person, but reason only, sways. And what madness is it, for them who might manage nobly their own affairs themselves, sluggishly and weakly to devolve all on a single person and, more like boys under age than men, to commit all to his patronage and disposal . . . they who think the nation undone without a king, though they swell and look haughty, have not so much true spirit and understanding in them as a pismire. [121–2]

A free Commonwealth, he declared, is not only the best of all possible forms of government, but also, 'with greatest probability, plainly commended—or, rather, enjoined—by our Saviour Himself to all Christians' (119). Under it 'they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the public at their own cost and charges, neglect their own affairs, yet are not elevated above their brethren, live soberly in their families, walk the streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, familiarly, friendly, without adoration; whereas a king must be adored like a demigod, with a dissolute and haughty court about him, of vast expense and luxury' (120). Milton wondered 'how any man who hath the true principles of justice and religion in him can presume or take upon him to be a king and lord over his brethren, whom he cannot but know whether as men or Christians to be for the most part every way equal or superior to himself' (123–4).

He reminded his countrymen of the glory and promise of the early republican experiment, of the evidences of God's special favour, of the many who had died for freedom. After such a beginning, 'to creep back so poorly, as it seems the multitude would, to their once abjured and detested thraldom of kingship, not only argues a strange, degenerate corruption suddenly spread among us, fitted and prepared for new slavery, but will render us a scorn and derision to all our neighbours' (117). Moreover, while monarchy 'of itself may be convenient to some nations, yet to us who have thrown it out, received back again it cannot but prove pernicious. For the kings to come, never forgetting their former ejection, will be sure to fortify and arm themselves sufficiently for the future against all such attempts hereafter from the people' (137).

> if we return to kingship, and soon repent, as undoubtedly we shall when we begin to find the old encroachments coming on by little and little upon our consciences, which must necessarily proceed from king and bishop united inseparably in one interest, we may be forced perhaps to fight over again all that we have fought, and spend over again all that we have spent, but are never like to attain thus far as we are now advanced to the recovery of our freedom, never likely to have it in possession as we now have it, never to be vouchsafed hereafter the like mercies and signal assistance from Heaven in our cause, if by our ingrateful backsliding we make these fruitless to ourselves . . . [118]

Under kingship, Milton warned, any Parliament seeking the people's liberty will 'be forced to leave the contest endless between prerogative and petition of right, till only Doomsday end it' (362). He warned also that 'if there be a king, which the inconsiderate multitude are now so mad upon' (134), there will certainly be 'revenges, and offences that will be remembered and returned, not only by the chief person but by all his adherents, accounts and reparations that will be required, suits and indictments—who knows against whom or how many?' (138).

Reviewing the recent situation which had brought on this madness, Milton took a carefully cheerful view of events:

> I doubt not but all ingenuous and knowing men will easily agree with me that a free Commonwealth, without single person or House of Lords, is by far the best government if it can be had; but we have all this while, say they, been expecting it, and cannot yet attain it. I answer that the cause thereof may be ascribed with most reason to the frequent disturbances, interruptions, and dissolutions which the Parliament hath had, partly from the impatient or disaffected people, partly from some ambitious leaders in the army—much contrary, I believe, to the mind and approbation of the army itself and their other commanders

> when they were once undeceived or in their own power. Neither ought the small number of those remaining in Parliament be made a byword of reproach to them, as it is of late by the rabble, whenas rather they should be therefore honoured as the remainder of those faithful worthies who at first freed us from tyranny and have continued ever since, through all changes, constant to their trust . . . And the government being now in so many faithful and experienced hands, next under God, so able, especially filling up their number as they intend, and abundantly sufficient so happily to govern us, why should the nation so little know their own interest as to seek change . . .? [124–5, 362, 364]

Since God had 'wonderfully now the third time brought together our old patriots, the first assertors of our religious and civil rights' (360), nothing remained but, in all reason, for England to 'solicit and entreat them not to throw off the great burden from their shoulders which none are abler to bear, and to sit perpetual' (364).

This would bring speedily the firm and free Commonwealth which people wanted, yet now feared to be unattainable. Experience had painfully demonstrated that successive, impermanent parliaments 'breed commotions, changes, novelties, and uncertainties, and serve only to satisfy the ambition of such men as think themselves injured' (127/363); therefore, a 'Grand or General Council, being well chosen, should sit perpetual' (126). If abuse of such power be feared, 'the best expedient will be, and with least danger, that every two or three years a hundred or some such number may go out by lot or suffrage of the rest, and the like number be chosen in their places'; but, Milton added, 'in my opinion better nothing moved unless by death or just accusation' (363).

Although not weakening his desperate case by making freedom of conscience a *sine qua non*, Milton nevertheless pronounced it something which a free Commonwealth was most 'inclinable' to favour and to protect (142); and he asked: 'who can be at rest, who can enjoy anything in this world with contentment, who hath not liberty to serve God and to save his own soul according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose?' (141).

> He who cannot be content with this liberty to himself, but seeks violently to impose what he will have to be the only religion upon other men's consciences, let him know, bears a mind not only unchristian and irreligious, but inhuman also, and barbarous. . . . If there were no meddling with church matters in state councils, there would not be such faction in choosing members of Parliament, while everyone strives to choose him whom he takes to be of his religion, and every faction hath the plea of 'God's cause'. Ambitious leaders of armies would then have no hypocritical pretences so ready at hand to contest with parliaments, yea, to dissolve them and make way to their own tyrannical designs. In sum, I verily suppose there would be then no more pretending to a Fifth Monarchy of the saints, but much peace and tranquillity would follow—as the United Netherlands have found by experience, who while they persecuted the Arminians, were in much disquiet among themselves and in danger to have broke asunder

> into a civil war; since they have left off persecuting, they have lived in much more concord and prosperity. [365–6]

This passage would offend Presbyterians and Fifth Monarchists alike, but Milton could not resist arguing the point for what might prove to be the last time. (He must have later considered it a tactical error; the words were omitted from the second edition of the pamphlet.)

'The other part of our freedom', he continued, 'consists in the civil rights and advancements of every person according to his merit'—

> the enjoyment of those never more certain, and the access to these never more open, than in a free Commonwealth. And both, in my opinion, may be best and soonest obtained if every county in the land were made a little commonwealth, and their chief town a city (if it be not so called already) where the nobility and chief gentry may build houses or palaces befitting their quality, may bear part in the government, make their own judicial laws and execute them by their own elected judicatures without appeal, in all things of civil government between man and man. So they shall have justice in their own hands, and none to blame but themselves if it be not well administered. In these employments they may exercise and fit themselves till their lot fall to be chosen into the Grand Council, according as their worth and merit shall be taken notice of by the people. As for controversies that shall happen between men of several counties, they may repair, as they do now, to the capital city. They should have here also schools and academies at their own choice, wherein their children may be bred up in their own sight to all learning and noble education, not in grammar only but in all liberal arts and exercises. [143–5/366]

This, of course, was Milton's trump card, his republican answer to the inevitable objection that perpetuating Parliament would take government away from the people. 'Nothing can be more essential to the freedom of a people', he affirmed, 'than to have the administration of justice and all public ornaments in their own election and within their own bounds, without long travelling or depending on remote places to obtain their right or any civil accomplishment' (146).

Such was his ingenious 'way to establish a free Commonwealth', and it was ready for publication on 21 February, when events suddenly took a turn which Milton had not anticipated. The Presbyterian 'secluded' members were reseated and the original Long Parliament theoretically restored. It was Monk's doing, and it was another bloodless revolution. To the author of *The Ready and Easy Way* it was a catastrophe. Many of the secluded members were known Royalists, and all of them were enemies to freedom of conscience. Presbyterianism, and the Solemn League and Covenant, would now be revived. Moreover, one John Milton would certainly lose his job as a public official.[114]

What to do? Time was running out; a decision had to be made without delay. Milton made a few hasty changes, dictated a brief preface, and rushed the manuscript to Thomas Newcomb, his printer. Newcomb may have hesitated; but the pamphlet of eighteen quarto pages appeared on or slightly before 3 March, having been produced in such haste that it was necessary to take the unusual step of publishing some errata in *Mercurius Politicus* for 1–8 March.[115] Even so, it failed to keep up with the speed of events. A decision had already been made to convene a new, 'full and free' Parliament on 25 April—the very move that Milton had hoped to forestall! Ironic now were his words: 'With all hazard I have ventured what I thought my duty to speak in season, and to forewarn my country in time.' Hazardous indeed was his ringing peroration:

> What I have spoken is the language of 'the Good Old Cause'; if it seem strange to any, it will not seem more strange, I hope, than convincing to backsliders. Thus much I should perhaps have said though I were sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones, and had none to cry to, but with the Prophet's 'O earth, earth, earth' to tell the very soil itself what God hath determined of Coniah and his seed for ever. But I trust I shall have spoken persuasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men, to some perhaps whom God may raise of these stones to become Children of Liberty, and may enable and unite in their noble resolutions to give a stay to these our ruinous proceedings and to this general defection of the misguided and abused multitude. [148/367]

Seventeenth-century readers must have gasped when they met this passage, for few could have failed to recognize the allusion and remember the words of Jeremiah: 'And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. . . .'

*The Ready and Easy Way* was greeted with scornful laughter by Royalist pamphleteers. In an anonymous tract published about 13 March, Roger L'Estrange mocked: 'I could only wish his Excellency [Monk] had been a little civiller to Mr. Milton, for, just as he had finished his Model of a Commonwealth . . . in come the secluded members and spoil his project.' In this same tract, *Be Merry and Wise*, L'Estrange mentioned the scheme for perpetuating the Rump, and remarked, 'It were great pity these gentlemen should lose their longings.'[116] About 17 March another anonymous pamphlet, *The Character of the Rump*, appeared with this barbed comment:

> But John Milton is their goose-quill champion, who had need of 'a help meet' to establish anything, for he had a ram's head and is good only at batteries—an old heretic both in religion and manners, that by his will would shake off his governors as he doth his wives, four in a fortnight. The sunbeams of his scandalous papers against the late King's Book is the parent that begot his late new Commonwealth; and because he, like a parasite as he is, by flattering the then tyrannical power hath run himself into the briers, the man will be angry if the rest of the nation will not bear him company, and suffer themselves to be decoyed into the same condition. He is so much an enemy to usual practices that

> I believe, when he is condemned to travel to Tyburn in a cart, he will petition for the favour to be the first man that ever was driven thither in a wheelbarrow.[117]

A week later appeared William Collinne's *The Spirit of the Phanatiques Dissected*, with three of its '30 Queries' devoted to Milton's book:

> XXII. Whether J. M. his *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Commonwealth* without readmitting of kingship (which Thos. Newcomb mentions in his advertisements and paraphrastical book of Thursday the 8th instant) be not borrowed in copy from the States of Holland, or whether such a fool as the author deserve not to be sent to Bridewell for pretending so much good to his country and dare not show his name to his libel? XXIII. Whether his new frame of a Commonwealth without readmitting of kingship, together with that fool Harrington's, ought not to be sent to *terra incognita* or Sir Thomas More's Utopia, together with the authors themselves, to frame a free state there? XXIV. Whether any ingenious person can choose but laugh at these fools' assertions and pretence of maintaining such a ridiculous thing as a free state, since in twelve years' time we have found by experience the nation never was more quiet than when governed by a single person?[118]

This writer, if his contemptuous words were ever read to Milton, must have seemed the most insulting of the three, for he professed not to recognize the famous initials, 'J. M.', which had appeared on the title page of the *Easy Way*.

There were other printed attacks, including a pamphlet and a book devoted exclusively to Milton's proposal, but he did not stop to answer them. He had been frustrated by circumstances, by a totally unexpected turn of events; and he sought, now, some new means of averting the imminent calamity. Negotiations with Charles II were becoming more open; his health was being drunk in taverns, and songs were being composed for jubilant Cavaliers to sing. Even die-hard republicans were admitting that the Republic was doomed, and those who preferred anything to a return of the Stuarts were talking desperately of some other single-person government that might succeed. Monk, of course, was still master of the political situation, and he was deluged with deferential advice. Milton had sent him a copy of *The Ready and Easy Way*, we may be sure. 'Old George' may even have read it. In any case, Milton assumed Monk's acquaintance with its argument when he dictated a letter to the General, recommending that he use his prestige, and if necessary his army, to give England a free Commonwealth before it was too late.[119]

It was a bold proposal, an appeal to both the patriotism and the imagination of the man. It amounted to this: let Monk 'call up forthwith the chief gentlemen out of every county' and inform them that he 'will put into their hands forthwith the possession of a free Commonwealth' (107). 'If these gentlemen convocated refuse these fair and noble offers of immediate liberty . . . no doubt there be enough in every county who will thankfully accept them, your Excellency . . . having a faithful veteran army so ready and glad to assist you in the prosecution thereof' (109). And what should be Monk's 'offers', to be bestowed on England in spite of herself? Milton's old plan, in essence, but modified once more to meet a new situation and a graver emergency. Not even a mention, now, of freedom of conscience; and no plea for the despised Rump. Let Monk proclaim a free Commonwealth, and let 'the ensuing election be of such' who agree, abjuring a single person and House of Lords (107). Let those elected constitute a perpetual Grand or General Council of the nation, 'a firm foundation and custody of our public liberty, peace, and union' (109), with Monk himself continuing as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

So much for the sake of stability. The great objection to a permanent parliament, Milton had now learned, was its threat to popular freedom. He had extended, therefore, his earlier conception of local control over justice and education, and had evolved a theory of political federation for Monk to establish, by fiat if necessary. 'A standing Council in every city and great town' should be immediately elected to govern 'that place with a competent territory adjoined', having complete control over local education and justice, including the power to make its own laws. The Grand Council in London would control the army and navy, administer all foreign affairs, raise and manage the public revenue ('but with provided inspection of their accompts'). It would also 'make all general laws, peace, or war—but not without assent of the standing Council in each city, or such other general assembly as may be called on such occasion from the whole territory, where they may without much trouble deliberate on all things fully, and send up their suffrages within a set time, by deputies appointed. Though this Grand Council be perpetual (as in that book I proved would be best and most conformable to best examples), yet they will then, thus limited, have so little matter in their hands, or power to endanger our liberty; and the people so much in theirs to prevent them, having all judicial laws in their own choice, and free votes in all those which concern generally the whole Commonwealth . . .' 'If this yet be not thought enough,' Milton added wearily, 'the known expedient may at length be used of a partial rotation' (108–9).

Here, at last, was a plan that might work. As its author pointed out with some pride, 'the full and absolute administration of law in every county, which is the difficultest of these proposals, hath been of most long desired, and the not granting it held a general grievance.' The scheme offered stability at the centre and representative government everywhere else. As soon as people saw 'the orderly, the decent, the civil, the safe, the noble effects', they would surely want to 'be partakers of so happy a government' (109). Let Monk proclaim it as England's constitution, and all would yet be well.

Alas for Milton, if not for England, Monk had other plans. He had declared publicly that he was against readmitting kingship, and Milton, whatever his private suspicions, had moved desperately on the assumption that the General meant what he had said. The assumption was unwarranted, as gossip, at least, had certainly warned the author of *The Present Means and Brief Delineation of a Free Commonwealth, Easy to be put in Practice, and without Delay*. Such was the enthusiastic heading of the futile letter to General Monk.

Although once more baffled in his efforts, the indomitable Milton sought some further means of striking a blow for freedom, and soon found one—or what, in his frantic zeal, appeared to be one. Bathetically, he administered a verbal whipping to a miserable clergyman who had talked out of turn.

On Sunday, 25 March 1660, the preacher at the Mercers' Chapel was one Matthew Griffith, who had been chaplain of Charles I, had several times been imprisoned under the Commonwealth, and was now, understandably, excited over the near-prospect of a restoration. He chose for the text of his sermon Proverbs xxiv. 21: 'My son, fear God and the king, and meddle not with them that be seditious or desirous of change.' Other Royalist sermons were being preached at the time, but Griffith's was both too impulsive and too tactless in tone. Besides urging loyalty to the exiled monarch, he attacked the Presbyterians and the Independents, comparing them to the Trojan Horse; and he went out of his way to extol Episcopacy as 'the true Protestant religion'. Charles II he likened to Samson, who would unexpectedly take his revenge. The sermon closed with an enthusiastic prophecy of sudden destruction for the seditious.[120]

This was exactly the kind of public utterance which Monk and the Council of State were anxious to prevent. Since the issue was theoretically to be decided by the Parliament called for 25 April, those temporarily in authority had to keep up the appearance of loyalty to their previous commitments. They feared some last-minute outburst of republican fervour which might disrupt their plans, and, even more, they feared an imprudent outburst of Royalist fervour which would force them to reveal their intentions before the right moment had arrived, thus inviting reaction. Griffith's sermon, therefore, was regarded as an unfortunate incident, and some Royalist sympathizers in London wrote to the King in complaint. But before action could be taken, the clergyman blundered again, twice. On 31 March he registered his sermon for publication, and, printing it immediately, he appended a dedication to Monk and an openly political pamphlet entitled 'The Samaritan Revived . . . Historically applied for the sound and speedy healing of our present dangerous distractions.' The dedication must have proved embarrassing to the General, who was there begged to carry on 'what you have already so happily begun . . . till you have finished this great and good work, and brought it to perfection'. 'It is a greater honour to make a King than to be one', declared Griffith, with double tactlessness. His folly having become dangerous, the Council of State promptly committed him to Newgate.[121]

Early in April Milton published his *Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon . . . Wherein many notorious wrestings of Scripture and other falsities are observed by J. M.* He did not register the slim pamphlet at Stationers' Hall, and neither printer nor bookseller put his name in the imprint. Time was now precious; and although the Council had imprisoned Griffith (Milton refers to the fact with satisfaction), they would probably not have permitted anyone to answer him publicly. Milton's reply was, of course, a hasty attempt to use Griffith's blunder and the subsequent action of the Council as a means of stemming the tide of Royalist sentiment. He pronounced the dedication to Monk 'an impudent calumny and affront to his Excellence'. The clergyman had charged the General 'most audaciously and falsely with the renouncing of his own public promises . . . and we trust his actions ere long will deter such insinuating slanderers from thus approaching him for the future' (152). This was the politic line to take in the circumstances, and one looks for more. There is no more. The remainder of the pamphlet is a fruitless rehashing of old arguments, with no reference to the real problems of the crisis. Probably Milton's faith in Monk was by this time thoroughly shaken. Certainly the General had rejected his advice, which had been for immediate action, before the elections to the new Parliament were begun.

Attacking Griffith, then, Milton was reduced to ridiculing his theology and to striking a last blow at Episcopacy in the person of 'a pulpit mountebank' (151). While he insisted that the nation was still committed to a free Commonwealth, he revealed his awareness of the overwhelming march of events by a single comment: if Englishmen really want a monarchy, he wrote, 'despairing of our own virtue, industry, and the number of our able men, we may then, conscious of our own unworthiness to be governed better, sadly betake us to our befitting thraldom—yet choosing out of our own number one who hath best aided the people, and best merited against tyranny, the space of a reign or two we may chance to live happily enough, or tolerably' (160). It was a bitter choice, but Milton let it be known that he preferred George Monk to Charles Stuart.[122]

In the course of refuting Griffith, Milton found occasion to restate one of his lifelong convictions: 'No law can be *fundamental* but that which is grounded on the light of nature or right reason, commonly called moral law, which no form of government was ever counted, but arbitrary, and at all times in the choice of every free people or their representers. This choice of government is so essential to their freedom that, longer than they have it, they are not free' (158). It could be argued, of course, that the 'full and free' Parliament called for 25 April would inherit the right here defended. The elections were not being restricted, as Milton had hoped; indeed, many people regarded the decision of this Parliament as a foregone conclusion; but there was always a *chance* that the new legislators would prove superior to 'the general defection of a misguided and abused multitude' and declare for a free Commonwealth. They should at least be told that they 'only will indeed be free, and deserve the true honour of that supreme title, if they preserve us a free people'. It was a forlorn hope, perhaps, but Milton felt it his duty to plead once more for the Good Old Cause. If the next Parliament could be persuaded to adopt the general plan of government he had urged Monk to proclaim without a Parliament, England might yet be saved.[123]

With the aid of amanuenses he began an extensive revision and enlargement of *The Ready and Easy Way*. Since there was no doubt that the people, in their 'epidemic madness', were 'choosing them a captain back for Egypt' (149), Milton condemned government by 'a licentious and unbridled democraty' (130) and justified, instead, the rule of an enlightened minority. 'Most voices ought not always to prevail where main matters are in question . . . there being in number little virtue, but, by weight and measure, wisdom working all things' (115). It had been so in 1648; the principle applied again in 1660. Although 'a greater part by far of the nation' now desired kingship, the wiser heads need not therefore yield, for

> this greatest part have both in reason and the trial of just battle lost the right of their election what the government shall be. Of them who have not lost that right, whether they for kingship be the greater number, who can certainly determine? Suppose they be; yet of freedom they partake all alike, one main end of government; which if the greater part value not, but will degenerately forgo, is it just or reasonable that most voices against the main end of government should enslave the less number that would be free? More just it is doubtless, if it come to force, that a less number compel a greater to retain (which can be no wrong to them) their liberty, than that a greater number for the pleasure of their baseness compel a less most injuriously to be their fellow slaves. They who seek nothing but their own just liberty have always right to win it and to keep it, whenever they have power, be the voices never so numerous that oppose it. [140–1]

This, of course (although he did not say so), had been the justification of his appeal to General Monk. Having advised Sylla the tyrant to no avail, he now advised the people. (On the title page of the new edition of *The Ready and Easy Way* he recorded the fact in a cryptic motto adapted from Juvenal: '*et nos consilium dedimus Syllæ, demus populo nunc.*')[124]

Milton's old enemies, the Presbyterians, had been returned to power in the last Parliament. Bringing his pamphlet abreast of the current situation he was torn between a desire to give them a final drubbing, and a hope that some few, at least, might be ready to fight for a free Commonwealth. He compromised, warning 'the new royalized Presbyterians' that 'their old doings, though now recanted', will not be forgotten by a returning

Stuart, 'whatever conditions be contrived or trusted on' (139). Furthermore, they had 're-engaged themselves never to readmit Episcopacy, which no son of Charles returning but will most certainly bring back with him, if he regard the last and strictest charge of his father' (143). Milton did not upbraid the recent Parliament for its renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant; instead, he addressed himself to some of the old arguments which the Covenant had revived, particularly the question of whether or not royal tyranny had removed any sworn obligation 'to preserve the King's person and authority'. Reminding his readers of Stuart abuses of power, he reasoned: 'We could not serve two contrary masters, God and the king, or the king and that more supreme law . . . our safety and our liberty.' The original Long Parliament had been bound 'by the law of nature only, which is the only law of laws truly and properly to all mankind fundamental, the beginning and the end of all government, to which no Parliament or people that will thoroughly reform but may and must have recourse—as they had, and must yet have, in church reformation (if they thoroughly intend it) to evangelic rules' (113). If England gave up the hope of a free Commonwealth, she would give up 'the best part of our liberty, which is our religion' (116). Milton deleted a long passage on freedom of conscience from the new edition of his pamphlet, but he could not resist adding this one sentence of grim admonition: 'Let our governors beware in time, lest their hard measure to liberty of conscience be found the rock whereon they shipwreck themselves, as others have now done before them in the course wherein God was directing their steerage to a free Commonwealth, and the abandoning of all those whom they call "sectaries", for the detected falsehood and ambition of some, be a wilful rejection of their own chief strength and interest in the freedom of all Protestant religion, under what abusive name soever calumniated' (143). Thus much to the Presbyterians.

Looking back over the past decade, Milton found a simple explanation of the mounting confusion: 'When monarchy was dissolved, the form of a Commonwealth should have forthwith been framed, and the practice thereof immediately begun, that the people might have soon been satisfied and delighted with the decent order, ease, and benefit thereof. We had been then by this time firmly rooted past fear of commotions or mutations, and now flourishing. This care of timely settling a new government instead of the old, too much neglected, hath been our mischief' (124–5). He presented once more, then, his suggestion of a permanent senate with powers limited by local governments—the scheme proposed to Monk, now considerably elaborated. He augmented his argument for perpetuity in the senate, but also, with some reluctance, acknowledged the possible desirability of adopting 'the known expedient' of the Rota-men: 'that annually (or if the space be longer, so much perhaps the better) the third part of senators may go out according to the precedence of their election, and the like number be chosen in their places, to prevent the settling of too absolute a power if it should be perpetual' (127). He did not like this business of 'partial rotation', and argued briefly against it, but if it won men to a free Commonwealth instead of monarchy, he would not, of course, oppose it. 'I forejudge not any probable expedient, any temperament', he said, 'that can be found in things of this nature so disputable on either side' (128). He urged, however, that it was better, 'in this wavering condition of our affairs, to defer the changing or circumscribing of our senate, more than may be done with ease, till the Commonwealth be thoroughly settled in peace and safety, and they themselves give us the occasion' (131). He was still convinced that England's prime need was for stability in government over a period of some years.

He also believed that his recent idea of autonomous local assemblies provided an ample safeguard against abuse of power by the central government. They would 'quite annihilate the odious power and name of committees', and they would 'do as much at home in their several shires, entire or subdivided, toward the securing of their liberty, as a numerous assembly of them all formed and convened on purpose with the wariest rotation' (132). Under this system there would be

> fewer laws to expect or fear from the supreme authority; or to those that shall be made, of any great concernment to public liberty, they may without much trouble in these commonalties, or in more general assemblies called to their cities from the whole territory on such occasion, declare and publish their assent or dissent by deputies within a time limited sent to the Grand Council—yet so as this their judgement declared shall submit to the greater number of other counties or commonalties, and not avail them to any exemption of themselves or refusal of agreement with the rest (as it may in any of the United Provinces, being sovereign within itself, oft times to the great disadvantage of that union). [144]

In addition to this scheme (somewhat clarified since it had been suggested to Monk), Milton proposed that elections be refined as a safeguard to liberty:

> not committing all to the noise and shouting of a rude multitude, but permitting only those of them who are rightly qualified, to nominate as many as they will; and out of that number, others of a better breeding to choose a less number more judiciously, till after a third or fourth sifting and refining of exactest choice, they only be left chosen who are the due number and seem by most voices the worthiest. To make the people fittest to choose, and the chosen fittest to govern, will be to mend our corrupt and faulty education, to teach the people faith not without virtue, temperance, modesty, sobriety, parsimony, justice; not to admire wealth or honour; to hate turbulence and ambition; to place everyone his private welfare and happiness in the public peace, liberty, and safety. They shall not then need to be much mistrustful of their chosen patriots in the Grand Council, who will be then rightly called the true keepers of our liberty, though the most of their business will be in foreign affairs. [131–2]

Here was a new idea, born of one of Milton's fundamental convictions about politics: only the virtuous can truly be free.

In thoroughly revising *The Ready and Easy Way*, Milton not only strengthened his main proposal and brought it up to date, but also amplified his attack on monarchy, reminding his readers of things they had perhaps forgotten, such as the wastefulness and corruption of court life. Should England restore the Stuarts, he warned (137), it 'will be the triumph of all tyrants hereafter over any people that shall resist oppression, and their song will then be, to others, "How sped the rebellious English?"; to our posterity, "How sped the rebels your fathers?" ' He appealed to the manhood of his countrymen:

> Can the folly be paralleled, to adore and be the slaves of a single person for doing that which it is ten thousand to one whether he can or will do, and we without him might do more easily, more effectually, more laudably ourselves? Shall we never grow old enough to be wise to make seasonable use of gravest authorities, experiences, examples? Is it such an unspeakable joy to serve, such felicity to wear a yoke, to clink our shackles, locked on by pretended law of subjection more intolerable and hopeless to be ever shaken off than those which are knocked on by illegal injury and violence? [136]

As if in answer to the pamphleteer who had said that he dared not show his name in the first edition, he spoke of having proved the limitations of civil power 'in another treatise' (142), and he added this sentence to a passage on England's past glories: 'Nor was the heroic cause unsuccessfully defended to all Christendom against the tongue of a famous and thought invincible adversary; nor the constancy and fortitude that so nobly vindicated our liberty, our victory at once against two the most prevailing usurpers over mankind, superstition and tyranny, unpraised or uncelebrated in a written monument likely to outlive detraction—as it hath hitherto convinced or silenced not a few of our detractors, especially in parts abroad' (116). The title page of the new edition, like that of the first, read simply, sufficiently: 'The author J. M.'[125]

Almost certainly there were difficulties getting the revised work printed. On 28 March the publisher of the first edition, Livewell Chapman, was in hiding, and an order for his arrest was issued by the Council of State. Copies of the first edition were probably not exhausted by mid April, and so the new edition was advertised on the title page as 'Printed for the Author', no bookseller or printer lending his name to the imprint. Milton must have borne the whole cost of the risky venture, and may even have tried, with the aid of courageous friends, to place copies in the hands of the Members of Parliament who gathered in London on 25 April. Whatever was done, copies quickly disappeared. Today only three appear to have survived.[126] Of the new Parliament Milton had said: 'If their absolute determination be to enthral us, before so long a Lent of servitude they may permit us a little Shrovingtime first, wherein to speak freely and take our leaves of Liberty' (111). He did what he had to do. Whether or not he was heard, he spoke, as he feared he might, 'the last words of our expiring liberty' (148).

Much has since been written about Milton's political views as enunciated in *The Ready and Easy Way*. A good deal of this criticism and analysis has unfortunately been vitiated by a quite unwarranted assumption: that the tract presents its author's final, considered theory of an ideal Commonwealth. Scholars, proceeding on this assumption, have thoughtfully compared his proposals with those of other political theorists, and have traced them to their spiritual sources in Athens or Rome, medieval thought or Machiavelli, Jean Bodin or George Buchanan. The truth of the matter is that Milton was dealing, not with ultimate ideals, but with desperate expedients. He modified his proposal each time he uttered it, from October of 1659 to April of 1660; and if a seventh such document had been produced in May or June, it would probably have offered a still different solution. The single constant in the three pamphlets, one set of 'Proposals', and two letters to influential statesmen with which Milton tried to stay the 'ruinous proceedings' that were rushing his country to 'a precipice of destruction' (149), was his plea for a perpetual senate, without a king. He defended this notion with the usual weapons of Scripture, history, and human reason; and of course he defended it as an ideal, a consummation devoutly to be wished in any age or any clime. But this ideal, with all the trappings eventually added to make it palatable, was one man's hopefully concocted cure for the epidemic madness that craved a king in preference to further change and confusion. To consider it as a scholarly, deliberate contribution to political theory, as Milton's maturest thoughts on government, is possible only with our backs absurdly turned to the crisis which produced it—the crisis which threatened to break its author's stout heart.

In his foredoomed endeavour he had been one of a rapidly diminishing group of stubborn men. When, calm in the sense of God's protection and his own inexorable destiny, he had dictated and published a revised edition of *The Ready and Easy Way*, he had stood almost alone. By thus calling attention to himself on the very eve of the Restoration, he was, of course (as surely he realized), inviting a terrible punishment. It is a stirring, unforgettable picture, this man fighting in his own way for human freedom as the forces of history swept over him. Blind Samson tugged amain at the pillars of public opinion—and the temple stood fast.

England was sick of the Puritan experiment. The 'saints' had had their chance, and they had failed to produce a consistent, constructive programme. There had been too much disagreement, too much war, too much taxation; and the people craved, as Milton well knew, a season of peace and stability. Because his last-minute proposals, and those of Harrington and others, had gained but few supporters, the only real alternative to the return of Charles II was another civil war without a perceptible goal.

This no one wanted. There was a silent vote during the tense hush of April 1660, and it was well-nigh unanimous.

'The Good Old Cause' had never found a ready and easy way to reconcile principle and practice, word and deed. It had murdered a king in the lofty name of popular sovereignty, but had not dared to seek popular support in a free election. It had brought on a revolution to save individual liberty, but had deemed it necessary to suppress honest John Lilburne and to drain the nation of money and merriment. It had abolished an Established Church in the spirit of thorough reformation, but had quickly substituted another, no less conservative establishment. Its army, after fighting memorably for civil freedom, had been used to eliminate the last pretences of parliamentary government and to create military dictatorship. It had harassed the country with a multiplicity of laws, but had not restored the ancient basis of respect for law. The truth is that organized Puritanism had lacked from the start either the theoretical willingness or the practical confidence which could grant other Englishmen a share in the government or in the blessings of religious toleration. And this exclusiveness, having eventually alienated most of the populace, proved its undoing.

Monk and the Council of State did a remarkable job of allaying suspicions and preventing disorders during the critical period before the meeting of Parliament on 25 April 1660. The army was adroitly kept from asserting itself, and Royalist boasting and impatience were quietly discouraged. Lambert escaped from the Tower on 9 April, but was captured before a republican uprising could gain headway. The only threat to the unspoken designs of England's leaders which they found it impossible to control was the rising enthusiasm of the Royalist pamphleteers. Milton had pointed out 'how open and unbounded the insolence and rage is of our common enemies' (149), and had urged backsliders to

> read the diabolical forerunning libels, the faces, the gestures that now appear foremost and briskest in all public places, as the harbingers of those that are in expectation to reign over us. Let them but hear the insolences, the menaces, the insultings of our newly animated common enemies crept lately out of their holes—their hell, I might say, by the language of their infernal pamphlets, the spew of every drunkard, every ribald, nameless, yet not for want of licence, but for very shame of their own vile persons, not daring to name themselves while they traduce others by name, and give us to foresee that they intend to second their wicked words, if ever they have power, with more wicked deeds. [VI. 139]

He had reason to speak with such feeling; he himself was the target of some of these Royalist pamphlets, and the revised *Ready and Easy Way* was his last opportunity to strike back.[127]

It was Milton's misfortune (and ours) that circumstances forbade his replying to one of these attacks. *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr Milton's Book entitled The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* is the cleverest and most penetrating of all the criticism ever levelled at him by his contemporaries. The anonymous writer avoids abuse and namecalling, using the rapier of satire against the learned bludgeon of his opponent, and with telling effect. There is a mock courtesy in his tone which makes his pamphlet amusing when it is most incisive. The author pretends to be none other than James Harrington, and, as a kindred political theorist, he insists that he takes no pleasure in the task assigned him, which is 'to give you an account of some reflections that they [the members of the Rota club] have lately made upon a treatise of yours'. He begs Milton's pardon, for the story he must tell is 'not only against mine own sense, but the interest which both you and I carry on'. This particular touch of satire is dropped near the end, however, when even 'Harrington' himself attacks Milton in words which ridicule the theories of both.[128]

The proceedings of the Rota are burlesqued throughout the pamphlet. Every opinion is solemnly voted on, resulting, of course, in unanimous verdicts against Milton, whose 'admirable eloquence' is subjected to some shrewd analysis. 'No conjurer's devil is more concerned in a spell than you are in a mere word, but never regard the things which it serves to express.' 'You fight always with the flat of your hand like a rhetorician, and never contract the logical fist.' 'You trade altogether in universals, the region of deceits and fallacy, but never come so near particulars as to let us know which among diverse things of the same kind you would be at.' 'All your politics reach but the outside and circumstances of things, and never touch at realities.' 'All your politics are derived from the works of declaimers.' And an even more damaging assertion: 'Your stiff, formal eloquence . . . you arm . . . with anything that lies in your way, right or wrong, not only begging but stealing questions, and taking everything for granted that will serve your turn.'[129]

Milton was not dishonest, but it is true, nevertheless, that his fervour or his indignation had, at times, thus blinded him. We may observe also, in passing, that this contemporary criticism of Milton's style would serve for today if time had not turned impracticality into prophecy and thus vindicated the man who fought for human freedom without ever stating very precisely what he meant. His contemporaries were both right and wrong, as contemporaries usually are. To most of them he seemed impractical because he was largely concerned with eternal verities; he seemed a foolish dreamer because he looked always beyond the fact to the justifying principle; he seemed a rabble-rouser because his words took on beauty and magic as the thought lifted them. If his vision had not given courage to the dreams of later men, we should now agree that 'it is all windy foppery from the beginning to the end, written to the elevation of that rabble and meant to cheat the ignorant'. A Milton is indeed a fanatic and a crackpot until his voice awakes an echo—until humanity acknowledges him to be a Milton.

Moreover, the man who keeps his eyes steadily upon his goal instead of upon the road to it will frequently stumble, and Milton frequently stumbled. We must not condemn too airily the contemporaries who jeered at his awkwardness, for the goal towards which he urged them might well have been a mirage. Ordinary men must judge by ordinary lights, and the witty author of *The Censure of the Rota* was, within his limitations, justified in asking why Milton 'did not give over writing, since' he had 'always done it to little or no purpose'. This satirist demonstrates his acquaintance with about half a dozen of his victim's works. Oddly enough, it is *Tetrachordon*, and not *The Doctrine of Divorce*, for which Milton has 'achieved the honour to be styled the founder of a sect'. Milton's proudest literary accomplishment, the *Defensio* against Salmasius, is dismissed as 'that admired piece which you writ to confute his wife and his maid'.[130]

*The Censure of the Rota*, a pamphlet of sixteen pages, appeared on or slightly before 30 March. A few days later another answer to *The Ready and Easy Way* was published. It is far less effective than the sparkling satire of *The Censure*; its author sounds like a clumsy timeserver, seeking publicity; but never in his lifetime did Milton receive a more respectful, even deferential rebuttal. To the twenty quarto pages of Milton's first edition, this writer, one George Starkey, replied in 248 octavo pages entitled *The Dignity of Kingship Asserted in Answer to Mr. Milton's Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth.* Starkey informs us that the *Easy Way* 'was received by many with applause'—a most illuminating admission! Conceding that his opponent's style has power 'to move the affections', he consoles himself with the thought that Milton lacks 'nothing on his side but truth'. There is something near admiration in his references to Milton's 'satirical pen'; there is unconcealed respect for the courage that once faced Salmasius; he grants that Milton is able, shrewd, and intelligent. Even allowing for an understandable residue of self-advertisement in this reply to 'so acute and universally owned a learned man', we can scarcely question the sincerity of most of the scattered praise. Unlike other contemporaries, this 'G. S.' mentions Milton's blindness, not to mock or to infer God's punishment, but to pity. More interesting than his deference to 'dangerous wit and wicked learning' are the various acknowledgements of Milton's literary gifts. He notes his opponent's copiousness and polish in expression, his 'ready invention'—'the expressions pathetical', the mastery of language 'smooth and tempting'. A few others in that time had also paid tribute to Milton's prose, but this critic is at once more ingenuous and more appreciative in his recognition of 'a fluent, elegant style'.[131]

The nature of his rebuttal need not detain us. Milton's attacks on the character of Charles the Martyr seemed to him, of course, scurrilous and impertinent, the product of a 'wicked, desperate wit'. Like other reactionaries, this 'Lover of Loyalty' also found his antagonist a lawless 'Christian libertine', a visionary with a 'windmill brain', one not above sophistry or deliberate misinterpretation of the Scriptures, not above taking an occasional hint from Machiavelli. It is apparent that he had previously made the acquaintance of *Eikonoklastes*, the first *Defensio*, and the treatise on *Hirelings*; and he knew *The Doctrine of Divorce* at least by hearsay. Of the other pamphlets and of Milton as a person he seems to have known nothing at all. He wrote because he considered the *Easy Way* a threat to destiny, and he flattered himself that he had refuted, not only this slim tract, but also the famous *Defensio* against Salmasius.[132]

Milton and other 'rebellious devils' were much in the public consciousness as the day of punishment and revenge drew near. He was suspected of writing still other pamphlets, such as *An Alarum to the Armies* and also

> a bold, sharp pamphlet called *Plain English*, directed to the General and his officers, &c. It is a piece drawn by no fool, and it deserves a serious answer. By the design, the subject, malice, and the style, I should suspect it for a blot of the same pen that wrote *Eikonoklastes.* It runs foul, tends to tumult, and not content barely to applaud the murder of the King, the execrable author of it vomits upon his ashes, with a pedantic and envenomed scorn pursuing still his sacred memory. Betwixt him [Milton] and his brother Rabshakeh [Needham] I think a man may venture to divide the glory of it. It relishes the mixture of their united faculties and wickedness. As yet, 'tis true, the hand is somewhat doubtful to us; but the drift, certain . . .

Such was the guessing of Roger L'Estrange in his *Treason Arraigned*, published about 3 April. Later in the month L'Estrange answered a pamphlet called *Eye-Salve* with one called *Physician Cure Thyself*, in which he declared: 'This eye-salve, gentlemen, which our pretending Oculist presents you with, is a medicine of the same composition which (by general report) struck Milton blind.'[133]

*The Ready and Easy Way* and the *Brief Notes* on Griffith's sermon were both attacked by L'Estrange in an anonymous pamphlet entitled *No Blind Guides*, dated 20 April on its title page and published on or shortly before 25 April. In his introductory paragraphs he reminds the reader that Milton was the author of *Eikonoklastes* and the *Defensio* and was even to his own wife 'an incubus'. He rather cleverly uses Milton's plan for a free Commonwealth against statements in the *Brief Notes.* In his eagerness to discredit his opponent, he resorts to many devices. Although accusing Milton of railing against Salmasius, he is himself abusive, in his opening sentence calling Milton a devil in human shape. He gives no indication that he had heard, or even read, Griffith's sermon, and he makes little effort to defend the foolish clergyman. 'Let him acquit himself in what concerns the divine, and I'll adventure upon the most material parts of the rest.' Despite this promise, L'Estrange argues with Milton's interpretation of a number of scriptural passages. It is noteworthy that he carefully avoids the dangerous subject of Monk's attitude toward a restoration; coming to the relevant part of Milton's pamphlet, he says that he will not concern himself with the latter's 'unmannerly descant' upon Griffith's dedication, and then drops the subject. He is, however, openly Royalist in sympathy: 'Is there, or is there not, at present any King of England? You say "No"; I'm of another mind.'[134]

The title of L'Estrange's pamphlet and the proverb quoted on its title page—'If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch'—may seem to the modern reader unnecessarily cruel and (when one reflects on the proverb's implications as touching the English people) strangely tactless. L'Estrange was writing against time, and the title page may have been a hasty afterthought suggested by the title of the second pamphlet which he was answering: *Eye-Salve.* In the text itself there are only two allusions to blindness, neither of them offensive: the first is a common saying which might have been quoted if Milton had not been blind; the second implies (once more) that he lost his sight as a result of his attack on the *Eikon Basilike.* L'Estrange could have been really cruel if he had wished; when one reads some of his other pamphlets, this one seems restrained and impersonal by comparison. And when we recall Milton's own violent methods in controversy, it is difficult to deplore, at this stage in England's history, a cry of *No Blind Guides.* The people saw clearly what they wanted, and tomorrow they would have it. (Twenty-eight years later, the name of Roger L'Estrange would be published as a proud subscriber to a new edition of *Paradise Lost.*)

For the regicides and die-hard republicans, now came the days and the nights of dread and uncertainty. Led along London streets, conspicuous in his affliction, Milton may have feared the sudden pistol shot, the unseen knife.[135] The fickle mob was bloodthirsty in temper. Even if he escaped with his life, any investments or property that he owned might soon be confiscated, as the property of Royalists had been a dozen and more years before. Milton's lease in the Rose in Bread Street had been transferred to Thomas Hussey on 10 June 1659, but he still had another house in that street.[136] All or most of his salary as Secretary (about £2,000) he had prudently invested in excise bonds, but he suddenly realized with dismay that it was already too late to convert these into cash.[137] On Saturday, 5 May 1660, he transferred at least one of these bonds—and very probably all of them—to Cyriack Skinner, who, as a lawyer, may have suggested this means of salvaging them. (The device proved to be unsuccessful, but the attempt reveals Milton's desperation, and it shows the concern that his friends must have felt.) The transfer was witnessed by Jeremy Picard and by one Elizabeth Wightman (who may have been a governess employed for Milton's three daughters). On the following Monday the transaction was recorded in the Registrar's office.[138]

Some of Milton's old associates had already fled the country, but the blind man could not travel without an adult companion, and, even then, there would be obvious difficulties. To do nothing, to remain in the capital awaiting the verdict of his judges, was the simplest course; but Milton's friends argued that this would be to invite certain doom. They counselled him to hide. If he were out of sight, they reasoned, something might be done to save him; there were influential persons who might be persuaded to intercede; and, in any case, if he gave up his Petty France residence and disappeared, he would be safe until future events dictated some new plan of action. To these urgings Milton listened and, as always when he faced a difficult decision, turned to his God for guidance.

## PART FIVE

# PARADISE LOST AND REGAINED

# 13. Restoration, 1660–1663

MILTON went into hiding. He was fifty-one, and it was a most uncharacteristic thing for him to do. He must have hated it, but helpless and inadequate in his affliction, he bowed to the fearful advice of those who wished him well. One of them, risking much for friendship, took the blind rebel into his own home; and from an inconspicuous house in Bartholomew Close, just off West Smithfield, the man in danger of his life and the courageous folk who concealed him waited and listened for news of the outside world.[1]

We may never learn the identity of the friend who hid the blind poet. If Marvell or Edward Phillips or Cyriack Skinner or Lady Ranelagh attempted to visit the fugitive, they probably did so by night. As the months dragged by—May, June, July, August—there was constant dread that the concealment would be discovered. A gossipy servant, a curious neighbour, a passer-by recognizing a face through a window—anything might bring disaster. Patiently, prayerfully, Milton himself paced a universe now shrunken to the dimensions of a few dark rooms. He sorely missed his daily exercise. Summer had come, and he was denied even the pleasure of strolling in a garden. If he ventured outdoors, if he once felt the warmth of the sun upon his upturned face, he risked, not only his own safety, but the safety of the kindly people who were trying to help him.

From day to day the news, brought by someone, was heard with grim attention. It was rarely good news. Often it was nerve-racking. Milton lived in suspense, like a soldier listening to strange noises in the dark. He spent many wakeful nights, and his days were heavy with waiting. Outside his friendly prison-house, beyond the narrow passage that was Bartholomew Close, in the great world beyond the old arch of St. Bartholomew which led to his hiding-place, the history of England was being written by excited and revengeful spirits.

May was a month of sheer madness. April had been hushed and ominous, a time of doubt and whispering and hesitation, a period of mysterious political manœuvres and ambiguous talk in high places. Then, quite suddenly, everything was changed: from the fourth meeting of the Convention Parliament on 1 May, when the royal letters from Breda had been received by both Houses, all London was loud in loyalty to the King.

During the weeks that followed, Englishmen released their pent-up emotions in countless ways—in singing and shouting, in drinking toasts, ringing bells, and building bonfires, in firing guns and cannon, in hanging effigies of Oliver and other hated rebels. Statues of the martyred Charles began to reappear in their old places; everywhere the arms and insignia of the Commonwealth were demolished, and the royal arms joyfully substituted. Out in the Downs, Samuel Pepys had the satisfaction of carrying the great news from ship to ship, hearing the cheers of the sailors, and watching from a small boat when the cannon of the fleet boomed their rejoicing. On 8 May, while happy crowds thronged the streets, Charles II was publicly proclaimed king and urged to return to his loving subjects. Then, until the twenty-ninth of the month, there were days of impatient waiting and mounting excitement.[2]

Prominent republicans began to disappear. Needham, for example, was rumoured already in Amsterdam. Harrington, like Milton, was in hiding—in the house of William Dugard. By the middle of the month Thurloe was under arrest, charged with high treason. The mood of Parliament was becoming evident. On 14 May there was an order for the arrest of all persons present at the last sitting of the court which had condemned the late King, and the estates of all such persons, living or dead, were ordered to be seized. On the following day Cromwell, Bradshaw, Ireton, and Pride were posthumously attainted of high treason by the Commons, and the selection of further victims was referred to a committee of the House. It was already decided that seven members of the infamous court would pay for their crimes with their lives. But which seven? And what punishment for the remaining members? And what republicans, not strictly regicides, would also be chosen for capital punishment? These were topics for lively argument among Englishmen in the final weeks of May. Behind the drawn curtains of the house in Bartholomew Close they were topics for gloomy speculation. Milton had not, of course, served on the court which had tried the King; but he had praised and justified that court in his writings, and he was a personal friend of some of its members. Furthermore, among the seditious non-regicides certain to be discussed on the floor of Parliament, he had been, perhaps still was, one of the most notorious.[3]

People were still reading, no doubt, the three recent publications which, even on their title pages, had attacked him—L'Estrange's *No Blind Guides*, Starkey's *Dignity of Kingship Asserted*, and the clever, anonymous *Censure of the Rota*.[4] Soon there was another: Joseph Jane's *Eikon Aklastos* of 1651 was reissued with a two-page dedication to Charles II and a new, fraudulent title, *Salmasius His Dissection and Confutation of the Diabolical Rebel Milton*.[5] In additional books and pamphlets that appeared during the first half of 1660 he was jeered at, condemned, and proposed for royal punishment. William Fairebrother, in *An Essay of a Loyal Brest*, ridiculed Milton and Harrington in a couplet.[6] Daniel Featley's *The Dippers Dipt* was reprinted with its reminder of Milton the Divorcer.[7] *The Out-Cry of the London Prentices for Justice* branded him as a knave and suggested that he be given one of the eyes of the regicide John, Lord Hewson.[8] *The Character of the Rump*, it will be remembered, had prophesied gleefully that he would be 'condemned to travel to Tyburn in a cart',[9] and William Collinne, in *The Spirit of the Phanatiques Dissected*, had suggested that he 'be sent to Bridewell' for his *Ready and Easy Way*.[10] In two crude stanzas *Britains Triumph* recommended that he commit suicide.[11] His writings against monarchy were remembered in an imaginary, satirical *Third Conference between O. Cromwell and Hugh Peters*.[12] His blindness was God's punishment, according to John Heydon in *The Idea of the Law Charactered*.[13] George Starkey mentioned him for a third time in one year, in *Royal and Other Innocent Bloud Crying Aloud to Heaven for Due Vengeance*.[14] Roger L'Estrange was even more persistent, referring to him in four additional pamphlets.[15]

Thus isolated, however, these attacks can mislead us, for Milton was but one of many republicans denounced in print. Though 'mercenary' and 'devilish', as David Lloyd was soon to call him, he was but a 'blind beetle that durst affront the Royal Eagle'.[16] Doubtless Milton thought of himself as among the most conspicuous, but we must try to see him now in the full perspective of May and June 1660. It was to be some time yet before even tentative answers to the all-important questions began to be heard. England was bustling with preparations for the return of Charles and his court. On 25 May there was the landing at Dover. Then there was a delay of nearly three days while the royal party paused at Canterbury, his Majesty having expressed the wish to enter London on his thirtieth birthday, which would be Tuesday the twenty-ninth. At last the great day came. In the morning, reports could have reached Milton of the acclaiming throngs that lined the long road between London and Rochester. In the late afternoon he himself probably heard the wildly cheering crowds, the trumpets and the kettledrums, as the royal progress moved through the streets of the city. The restored monarch slept at Whitehall that night for the first time in eighteen years. He was physically and emotionally exhausted, and doubtless slept soundly on the down bolster and the velvet bed, under the satin and fustian quilts so hurriedly prepared for him. Elsewhere in his capital there were men who lay stark awake, wondering what the morrow held for them.[17]

On 5 June the Commons chose the first of the seven regicides marked for execution. He was Thomas Harrison, and he had already been captured in Staffordshire. On the next day they settled on the remaining six, most of whom, Milton learned from his friends, had fortunately escaped to the Continent. On 7 June Hugh Peters was ordered to be arrested, and three other names were added to the list of doomed men: Edward Dendy, who had been serjeant-at-arms at the trial (and later of the Council of State);

John Cook, who had been prosecuting counsel; and Andrew Broughton, who had been merely a clerk. It was clear that the Commons had already broadened their definition of 'regicide' and found ways of exceeding their own limitation of seven. The outlook was so dark for Milton that he may even have snatched some comfort from the news of 8 June, when the Commons voted to make a list of twenty persons, non-regicides, to be marked for punishment *short of death.*[18]

The week of 11–16 June was one of almost unbearable suspense for the blind fugitive and his friends. As matters stood at the week's beginning, ten people had been chosen for execution, but forty-two living participants in the King's trial had apparently been excepted from the extreme penalty. Now, twenty other persons were to be joined with them in whatever punishment the Parliament deemed appropriate. On 11 June Lenthall and Sir Henry Vane were selected. On 12 June a third name was added. On 13 June the Commons chose five men who had been members of the Council of State. The next day a ninth name was agreed upon. Whitelocke had also been discussed at this session, but a vote had gone temporarily in his favour. On 15 June a tenth name was added, and the fateful list was half complete.

Finally came Saturday, 16 June, and the inevitable news! Milton and John Goodwin of Coleman Street had been discussed, and their literary defences of the rebellion had been roundly denounced. In a sense the news was puzzling, for neither Milton nor Goodwin was named among the twenty, although three additional persons had been chosen (and a fourth escaped by only a single vote). On the other hand, the King had been asked to call in one of Goodwin's books and both Milton's *Eikonoklastes* and his *Defensio* against Salmasius for burning by the common hangman. Worse, the Attorney-General, Geoffrey Palmer, had been instructed to institute proceedings at once against the two authors, and an order was issued for their immediate arrest. It seemed but a matter of time before they would be formally added to the list of the condemned.[19]

Then came Sunday. It is no secret that in the official quiet of a weekend politics flourish strangely. We may never know the details, but we can be sure that Milton's friends, however active before on his behalf, now put forth their most zealous efforts. We can also be reasonably sure of their chief argument: Milton was already 'punished'. Indeed, his blindness was a more severe punishment than any that Parliament could impose. The Commons of England should not try to outdo God in severity; they should emulate, instead, the spirit of clemency shown in his Majesty's declaration from Breda. The blind man had disappeared, but his friends would answer for his peaceable adherence to his Majesty's government. Seize and destroy the offending books, but let their author live to regret his mistakes.

Less than a month after Milton's friends, with such arguments and others, sought to save him from a revengeful Commons, there was published in London a large sheet or placard entitled, *The Picture of the Good Old Cause drawn to the Life in the Effigies of Master Praise-God Barebone, with Several Examples of God's Judgements on some Eminent Engagers against Kingly Government.* Milton was the third of seven 'Examples of God's Judgements', the others being Isaac Dorislaus, Anthony Ascham, Alderman Thomas Hoyle, Sir Gregory Norton, Robert Lockyer, and Colonel John Venn. The placard pointed out that Milton had been 'struck totally blind' for writing the *Eikonoklastes* and the *Defensio* against Salmasius. His six companions in crime were all dead, most of them having been murdered. The significant fact about the sheet, of course, is its implication that God had anticipated the work of Parliament in these seven instances. Even John Garfield, the vindictive and unscrupulous reviver of Jane's *Eikon Aklastos*, declared in his dedication to Charles II: 'I shall leave him under the rod of correction, wherewith God hath evidenced His particular judgement by striking him blind.' Royalists had long pronounced Milton's blindness an evidence of divine retaliation, and the problem of Milton's friends, in June of 1660, was to persuade the excitable Commons that justice had already been done.[20]

Who were these loyal friends, working behind the scenes on Sunday, 17 June, trying to arrange matters so that Milton's name would not even be put to a vote at the morrow's session? We can be reasonably sure of a few; we can guess at many. Edward Phillips, writing thirty-four years later, declared that his uncle was saved 'through the intercession of some that stood his friends both in Council and Parliament. Particularly in the House of Commons Mr. Andrew Marvell, a Member for Hull, acted vigorously in his behalf, and made a considerable party for him . . .'[21] This account gives us one name. Had it never been written we should have assumed Marvell's support, although it is still difficult to believe that one who had been a co-worker with Milton under the Protectorate succeeded in swaying many persons to his opinion.

Who were Milton's advocates on the newly appointed Privy Council? Monk and Edward Mountagu, possibly. Arthur Annesley, almost certainly. Writing as late as 1734, Jonathan Richardson reported having heard that Sir William Morrice and Sir Thomas Clarges 'were his friends and managed matters artfully in his favour'. Both Morrice and Clarges were also intimate friends of Monk and extremely influential, Morrice having just been appointed Secretary of State. If they indeed sought to help Milton, they were in a position to do much. Richardson was inclined, however, to explain their advocacy in terms of another story which he had heard: 'How came they to put their interest on such a stretch in favour of a man so notoriously obnoxious? . . . 'Twas Sir William Davenant obtained his remission in return for his own life procured by Milton's interest when himself was under condemnation, anno 1650. A life was owing to Milton (Davenant's), and 'twas paid nobly, Milton's for Davenant's at Davenant's intercession. The management of the affair in the House of Commons, whether by signifying the King's desire or otherwise, was perhaps by those gentlemen named.'[22]

This is a good story, and probably true. Jacob Tonson, about 1732, remembered having heard it from Davenant's own son.[23] But it is certainly not the whole truth. If Milton's part, large or small, in gaining Davenant his freedom was remembered and recited in June 1660, it doubtless influenced some persons not quite persuaded by other arguments. But there were other arguments. And Milton had many friends. Although no factual evidence has been discovered and no early biographer noted the possibility, who can doubt that Lady Ranelagh, either directly or through her devoted brothers, interceded on behalf of her old friend? The Boyles were high in royal favour in 1660, and the wishes of 'Sister Ranelagh' had the force of law in the family.[24]

When the Commons met on Monday, 18 June, they listened to a message from Charles II, read to them by Secretary Morrice. His Majesty urged greater speed in their proceedings. The debate was unusually vehement that day, and the next. John Goodwin, whose name had been coupled with Milton's, was added to the dreaded list. At the close of the session on 20 June the list of twenty was complete—*Milton not among them.* He was actually discussed again on the final day—as the twentieth man—but Miles Corbet was chosen in his stead.[25] The first crisis had been passed successfully; the blind man could be warmly congratulated; but all would not be well until the Bill had passed both Houses and become the law of the land.

From 20 June until 11 July, when the indemnity Bill finally passed the Commons, members of the Lower House continued to debate details. Divers vengeful attempts to disable everyone who had been active in any way throughout the Protectorate were voted down. There was a motion, for example, to make all who had held office during this period refund their salaries. On the whole, there was only one major lapse from the spirit of moderation maintained by the majority. Eleven regicide judges had failed to heed the royal proclamation for them to surrender themselves, and on 9 July the Commons condemned all eleven to death. There had been, of course, an official order of 16 June for John Milton also to surrender himself; or rather, to be precise about it, on 16 June it had been *resolved* 'That Mr. Milton and Mr. John Goodwin be forthwith sent for in custody by the serjeant-at-arms attending this House', and it had been *ordered* 'That his Majesty be humbly moved from this House that he will please to issue his proclamation for the calling in of the two books written by John Milton', &c. For some reason his Majesty had been rather remiss about preparing and issuing this proclamation. An order to the Attorney-General to draft it had been given at a Privy Council meeting on 27 June,[26] but for some reason Geoffrey Palmer was also rather remiss. The proclamation had not been published by 11 July, when debate ended in the Commons and the indemnity Bill was ready for consideration by the Lords. Milton was probably still in hiding, but there was yet no public recognition of the fact.[27]

The Lords surprised many persons, but most of all the Commons, by their attitude toward the Bill as submitted. After the second reading, on 17 July, it became apparent that they intended to examine the whole problem afresh and produce a Bill of their own based on quite independent premisses. It also became apparent that they deplored the moderation and leniency exhibited by the Lower House. From 17 July until 10 August they argued, substituting names on the various lists and considerably augmenting the total of those condemned to die. At any of their sessions the name of Milton might have been raised for discussion and a vote; *but apparently it was never raised.* Finally, on 10 August, they passed and returned to the Commons a much amended Bill. There were two days of indignant debate in the Lower House, which agreed that it was honour-bound to maintain its original position on some matters in which, unlike the Lords, it had tried to imitate the spirit of clemency expressed by the King. On 13 August a series of conferences between the two Houses was deemed necessary to compromise their differences.[28]

And on 13 August the royal proclamation relating to Milton finally appeared. It noted that 'John Milton and John Goodwin are both fled, or so obscure themselves that no endeavours used for their apprehension can take effect, whereby they might be brought to legal trial and deservedly receive condign punishment for their treasons and offences.' What kind of 'legal trial' was in prospect for the two culprits, the proclamation did not explain. It concerned itself with details of the suppression and calling in of their wicked and traitorous books. All persons with copies in their possession were commanded to deliver them within ten days to some public official. Appropriate officials were authorized to seize copies after the expiration of the ten-day period. Copies thus delivered or seized were to be collected by the sheriffs of the various counties, who would see them publicly burned by the hangman at the time of the next assizes. Further publication, sale, or circulation of any of the books was sternly forbidden.[29]

While this document was being distributed, posted, and read throughout England, four conferences between the two Houses were held. Eventually agreement was reached; and on 29 August the King gave his assent to the compromise Bill. Milton was not mentioned in it. Since he was not specifically excepted from the general pardon, according to law he was forgiven; according to law he was now as free and as safe as any other Englishman. It was all over, the discomfort of concealment, the agony of waiting. He could come out of hiding and live his own life again.

There was nothing to worry about except, perhaps, the ambiguous threat of a 'legal trial' in the King's proclamation. But these words were meaningless if the Act of Oblivion, now law, meant what it clearly said.[30]

Quietly, inconspicuously, Milton reappeared in London. In September, or soon after, he rented a house in Holborn, near Red Lion Fields, in the parish of St. Giles in the Fields.[31] It became possible, at long last, to take stock and make a few plans for the future. Listening to the Act of Oblivion, he found many reasons to congratulate himself. Thirty-two persons had been condemned to death, and nineteen others were under suspended judgement, threatened with execution by a subsequent Act of Parliament. Twenty-seven persons had been specifically cited for punishment short of death. In the final document, John Goodwin, whose case had been considered at the same time as his own, was put under perpetual brand of incapacitation, forfeiting all benefit of the Act if he ever accepted or exercised any office of trust in England, Wales, or Berwick-on-Tweed. This was a comparatively mild punishment (and, as a matter of fact, Goodwin was later indemnified), but it was punishment nevertheless. Milton's friends had done well. They had done so well that at least a few Englishmen expressed astonishment at the seeming oversight. It was 'to the surprise of all people', wrote Gilbert Burnet; for 'Milton had appeared so boldly, though with much wit and great purity and elegancy of style, against Salmasius and others upon that argument of the putting the King to death, and had discovered such violence against the late King and all the royal family, and against monarchy, that it was thought a strange omission if he was forgot, and an odd strain of clemency if it was intended he should be forgotten.'[32] But Milton was neither 'forgot' nor, if we remember the royal proclamation against his books, altogether forgiven. He was protected. Formal justice was apparently satisfied when, shortly before 10 September, 'several copies' of the two obnoxious books 'were solemnly burned at the Sessions-house in the Old Bailey, by the hand of the common hangman'.[33]

During September, however, just as he was beginning to breathe freely again, a hand was lifted from the grave to point an accusing finger at those who had shown such ostensible negligence. In Europe and in England the *Ad Ioannem Miltonum Responsio* of Salmasius was published posthumously. The book was registered in London on 19 September; it had been published in Dijon on 5/15 September, the dead man's son having signed the dedication to Charles II about two weeks earlier. This work was, of course, the long-delayed rebuttal which the English champion had awaited so eagerly during 1652 and 1653. Alas, he could not answer it now! He could only listen with set face while someone read the more than three hundred pages aloud to him, and then sit back and wait for the popular reaction to it during the months when the execution of the regicides began and feeling ran high.[34]

Fortunately for Milton, the unfinished *Responsio* of Salmasius was not only in Latin; it was also in very small print, with no paragraphing. We may doubt that many persons found either the leisure or the interest to penetrate its prolixity. The controversy was as dead as one of its participants. Still, to the surviving participant it must have seemed a bitter irony that the book appeared when it did. One can sympathize with Milton's frustration, and at the same time be glad. If the *Responsio* had appeared in any year before the Restoration, the blind man would almost certainly have spent his time and energy upon a fourth *Defensio*, and other, more fruitful labours would have suffered delay. His hands were tied now—tied to the interrupted manuscript of *Paradise Lost*. We can be happy that Salmasius had the last words.

The last words were as abusive as they were tedious. Milton was depicted as a puny, obscure schoolmaster, who cherished ridiculous aspirations as a poet, who repudiated his wife after a year of marriage, and who had volunteered to defend the regicides when his masters were unable to find anyone else willing to descend so low. Who ever heard his name before this *Defensio* of his? He was obviously a liar and a hypocrite, for he pretended to write a defence of the people of England, whereas everyone knew that the rebellion was the work of a small party—Cromwell, the army, and the Independents. Milton was foul enough to call Salmasius a eunuch, and yet had printed verses in which Italians praised his beauty, as though he were a maid instead of a man. Salmasius had conned the 1645 *Poemata* to devastating effect. Offering a number of specific illustrations he criticized Milton's idiom and metrics, and then dismissed the poems as childish stuff. His preface, in which he made these and other personal comments, filled fifty pages; there followed two completed chapters and a long fragment of a third. Clearly he had undertaken a thorough, chapter-by-chapter rebuttal. If he had lived to finish it, if he had preserved through twelve chapters the proportions indicated, his total reply would have extended to something like 1,400 pages.[35]

Milton, we can be sure, noticed all these features of the Salmasian *Responsio* and considerably more in the way of castigation and abuse. He may have been still digesting his opponent's book when, probably in November, he was suddenly arrested and imprisoned. James Norfolk, Serjeant-at-arms of the Commons, made the arrest, his warrant presumably the House resolution of 16 June. For the first time in his life, and quite unexpectedly, Milton experienced the inside of a jail.[36]

(In the county jail at Bedford another man, twenty years younger than Milton but even more uncompromising in his fundamental convictions, was just beginning a term of imprisonment which was to last a dozen years. He was offered release if he would stop his preaching, and he answered that he would obey God rather than man. His stubbornness worked great hardship on his blind daughter and his three other children, but he did what he had to do. Kept in strict confinement, he preached to his fellow prisoners and busied his hands in the making of thread laces. He also found leisure to write. He was the ignorant son of a tinker; he knew few books beyond the Bible; but something told him that he had a message worth committing to the printed page. It was no epic, no work of art or learning—only the personal story of grace abounding to the chief of sinners.)

John Milton, unlike John Bunyan, was soon released. His case was discussed in the Commons on Saturday, 15 December, and it was agreed that he should have the full benefit of the indemnity Bill, since he was nowhere excepted from pardon. It was ordered, however, that he should pay the appropriate fees to the serjeant-at-arms for his imprisonment. On Monday, 17 December, Andrew Marvell brought Milton to the attention of the House once more. Announcing that the serjeant-at-arms had demanded fees of £150, an exorbitant sum, he asked for an investigation. His motion was seconded by Colonel Edward King and Colonel Robert Shapcott. In the discussion that followed, Sir Heneage Finch complained that Milton, having been Latin Secretary to Cromwell, deserved hanging. Nevertheless, the motion passed, and the Committee for Privileges was ordered to call both Milton and the serjeant-at-arms before them, and to determine what was 'fit to be given the serjeant for his fees in this case'. Here our knowledge of the matter ends. We are certain only that in December 1660 he was granted an official pardon.[37]

After the crowded year of the Restoration, Milton deliberately sought obscurity. He was aided, of course, by the swift changes which the new régime effected, and by the blessed alchemy of time. His friends continued loyal, and curious foreigners occasionally sought him out on visits to London, as they had done of old;[38] but, living in seclusion, he probably became an almost legendary figure to those Englishmen who remembered but did not know him. Persons who do sensational things, and then drop completely out of sight, often become nightmarish monsters to some, saints or martyrs to others. The evidence is slight, however, for his countrymen were so absorbed in the exciting affairs of a new era that, after 1660, they alluded but rarely in print to the former opponent of royalty. We know only that a few young men 'haunted his house day by day', indulging in hero-worship, and that a few older men nursed their hate. We may be sure that Cyriack Skinner came to see him, bringing his new wife; he had married Elizabeth Graves at St. Mary le Strand on 28 July 1660. Another frequent visitor, in 1662 or 1663, was one Samuel Parker, an admiring young bachelor of Oxford. Parker was 'puritannically educated' and a devout Presbyterian—but soon to abandon his nonconformist views and embrace Anglicanism. Indeed, from frequenting Milton's house 'incessantly' he was eventually to attack his blind host in print.[39]

Though it echoes a passage in *Paradise Lost*, one wonders how much credence to give Richardson's assertion that Milton 'was in perpetual terror of being assassinated, though he had escaped the talons of the law. He knew he had made himself enemies in abundance. He was so dejected he would lie awake whole nights.'[40] It may be so. In any case, it is certain that he tried to put politics out of his mind, so that he could resume the composition of his epic. Writing brought relief, but it was no anodyne; into the throbbing words the poet poured both art and heart—to the everlasting confusion of romantic critics. He was able to write eloquently of rebellion and frustration because he had lived them. He was able to write serenely of the justice of God because he still believed in it. He was, in proof, through an all-wise providence, fulfilling a promise. As early as 1641, interrupting his mockery of Bishop Hall for a devout prayer, he had covenanted with his Maker to sing 'an elaborate song to generations'. The following year he had also told his fellow countrymen: 'It might be worth your listening, readers, as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time, when there shall be no chiding'.[41] The 'still time' had come perforce, but it had come. He had known that it would.

The house in Holborn was for some reason unsatisfactory (perhaps it lacked a garden), and he soon moved to another, in Jewin Street, situated near Redcross Street, in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate.[42] Perhaps at this time, perhaps earlier, his daughters returned to him. (It is surely safe to assume that they were in the care of someone else, maybe their grandmother Powell, while Milton was in hiding.[43]) Early in 1661, Anne, the lame one, was fourteen; Mary was twelve; and little Deborah was eight. They were not yet old enough to be of much help to their father.

Milton liked an orderly household, and, as we have noticed before, he had a definite routine for his own activities. In the winter he awoke at five in the morning; during other seasons at four. He had a man to read to him, and often he would lie in bed half an hour or so, listening to words of comfort or wisdom or inspiration. He was especially fond of hearing the Old Testament in the original Hebrew at the beginning of the day. Afterwards, he would devote an appropriate period to contemplation. By seven o'clock he usually had a stock of verses ready to dictate. If his amanuensis was late in arriving, he would sometimes grumble whimsically, saying, 'I want to be milked.' The morning was entirely devoted to dictation or to listening while his man read aloud. After dinner, at noon, he liked to walk. Walking had always been his favourite form of exercise, and, even though blind, he would often walk three or four hours at a time, weather permitting. When unable to go outdoors, he exercised himself with a swing, using a pulley to keep himself in motion. He also enjoyed playing on his organ, or his bass-viol. He had many visitors, more than he desired. In the evenings he preferred to listen to some choice poets, partly for refreshment, partly to store his fancy against the morning. But if friends came, he would talk cheerfully with them in his study, perhaps between six and eight, and then go downstairs to a light supper. After supper he smoked his pipe and drank a glass of water. He usually went to bed about nine.[44]

Even when he lacked a servant able to read to him or to take dictation, he daily had someone or other ready and willing to do these all-important favours. Friends might send him their children, knowing that he would teach them much; and very often older people were themselves glad to help, enjoying the learned conversation which inevitably accompanied their labours. Milton would sometimes greet them with his little joke about wanting to be milked, and would then lean far back in his easy chair, his leg flung over an arm of it, and begin to recite. Circumstances had developed in him unusual powers of memory. He would, at times, dictate as many as forty lines of his epic, we are told, and then reduce them to half that number. Frequently he would compose in the morning while lying in bed.[45]

Although actual records of visits are missing, we can be reasonably certain of many of the friends, old and new, who came to the house in Jewin Street, eager to be of some assistance, or wanting to pay their respects. There were, of course, Edward Phillips, Cyriack Skinner, Andrew Marvell, and Dr. Nathan Paget (probably Milton's personal physician in this period). Jeremy Picard was still, perhaps, available as a trusted amanuensis. Marchamont Needham was back in England, luckily pardoned by the Act of Oblivion. On 25 November 1660 Christopher Milton had been called to the bench of the Inner Temple, and there is evidence that then or later he paid regular visits to his brother.[46] He may also have sent his sons to serve as amanuenses. Thomas Agar, Milton's brother-in-law, may have been an occasional visitor; with the Restoration he had been returned to his old post as Deputy Clerk of the Crown. Henry Lawes and George Thomason were still alive. Arthur Annesley was created Earl of Anglesey on 20 April 1661, but we know that his new prominence did not inhibit his friendship with the blind poet. Davenant, we may suppose, also came to call; indeed, he later sent one of his sons to Milton for instruction. An antiquarian bookseller, Edward Millington, eventually became one of Milton's favourite companions on the afternoon walks. Another 'particular acquaintance' was Sir Robert Howard. A subsequent admirer, perhaps a friend in this period, was Dr. Samuel Barrow. In addition there were a number of former pupils, some of whom must have kept in touch with their old master. Thomas Gardiner of Essex, for example, had been knighted on 17 July 1660. Richard Jones was back in England and a member of the newly organized Royal Society. Sir Peter Wentworth, member of several Councils of State under the Commonwealth (1650–3), also continued a friend of the former Latin Secretary, and eventually (1673) remembered him most generously in his will. We can be confident that there were still other associates of the old days who remained loyal.[47]

The last years of a great man's life are likely to be most fruitful of anecdotes. A few of the stories about Milton, unverifiable but probably true, belong almost surely to the post-Restoration years. The blind man, we are told, listened one day to a lady singing, and, pleased by her voice, exclaimed, 'Now will I swear this lady is handsome!'[48] He liked to tease, and once at least he went too far: 'Milton had a servant, who was a very honest, silly fellow, and a zealous and constant follower of these [fanatic] teachers. When he came from the meeting, his master would frequently ask him what he had heard, and divert himself with ridiculing their fooleries or (it may be) the poor fellow's understanding (both one and t'other probably). However, this was so grievous to the good creature that he left his service upon it.'[49] Certainly post-Restoration in origin are some additional records of conversation. Sir Robert Howard once asked him what made him side with the republicans. 'Because theirs was the most frugal government', Milton replied, adding that the mere 'trappings of a monarchy might set up an ordinary commonwealth.'[50] In a more serious vein 'he used frequently to tell those about him the entire satisfaction of his mind that he had constantly employed his strength and faculties in the defence of liberty, and in a direct opposition to slavery. He ever expressed the profoundest reverence to the Deity as well in deeds as words, and would say to his friends that the divine properties of goodness, justice, and mercy were the adequate rule of human actions, nor less the object of imitation for private advantages than of admiration or respect for their own excellence and perfection.' On the other hand, 'love of dominion or inclination to persecution', he would say bitterly, 'is a piece of popery inseparable from all churches!'[51]

In the latter part of his life, John Toland tells us, Milton 'was not a professed member of any particular sect among Christians, he frequented none of their assemblies, nor made use of their peculiar rites in his family.'[52] He had developed his own Christian Doctrine, which he hoped some day to publish to the world, and in it he had expressed his conviction that neither a pious man nor a profane should be forced into any given church or be compelled to attend public worship. Since the individual believer enjoys divine guidance, the illumination of the Holy Spirit, he possesses the right to interpret the Scriptures for himself, and civil power should not force religious conformity upon him. These had come to be Milton's profound beliefs, and he lived them.[53]

Some further stories which have come down to us have an apocryphal ring. For example, on 6/16 October 1662 Christian von Boineburg reported from Mainz to a friend that 'Milton greatly laments he is no longer allowed to write satire.'[54] There is also a tradition that James, Duke of York, visited the poet. His blindness, the royal guest is supposed to have suggested (with most unregal bluntness), was a judgement of God on him for his writings. 'If your Highness thinks that the calamities which befall us here are indications of the wrath of Heaven, in what manner are we to account for the fate of the King your father? I have only lost my eyes, but he lost his head.' So Milton is supposed to have replied, and so (if we wish to believe the tale) he confounded a king-to-be.[55]

Dr. Paget of Coleman Street, one of his intimate friends in this period, told the blind man one day about another person who might be available as a regular reader, at least of books in Latin. This was a young Quaker by the name of Thomas Ellwood. Paget had heard about him from a Quaker friend, Isaac Penington,[56] son of the famous republican of the same name who had recently been tried with the other regicides and had died in the Tower, 17 December 1661. According to Penington, Tom Ellwood, twenty-two and serious-minded, had realized the defects of his early education, had tried hard to recover his knowledge of Latin, but had finally decided that the effort was hopeless without expert guidance. He was eager to prove that, although the Quakers denied that human learning was essential to a gospel ministry, they did not therefore (as was often cast as a reproach upon them) despise learning. He would be willing to read to Milton every day (except Sunday) at some appointed time, if Milton in turn would instruct him. Was such an arrangement satisfactory?

The poet agreed, and shortly thereafter, probably in March or April of 1662, Dr. Paget brought the young man to the house in Jewin Street and introduced him. Ellwood was impressed by the courtesy with which he was received; he knew that Milton was 'a gentleman of great note for learning throughout the learned world'. The blind scholar mentioned his regard for Isaac Penington, asked Ellwood a number of questions about his studies, and expressed pleasure at the prospect of their closer association. Ellwood then took a lodging as close to Milton's house as he could find, and the daily visits began.[57]

They met in the afternoons, sitting together in Milton's dining-room. At the very outset the teacher dismayed his new assistant by declaring that the English pronunciation of Latin, which Ellwood had formerly been taught, had better be forgotten and the foreign pronunciation learned in its stead. 'If you would have the full benefit of the Latin tongue,' Milton said in effect, 'not only to read and understand the language but also to converse with foreigners, you must master the pronunciation used on the Continent.' He immediately started to teach the young Quaker the different sound of the vowels, and such variations in the sound of the consonants as *c* before *e* or *i* like *ch*, and *sc* before *i* like *sh*. Before their first day together Ellwood had felt some confidence in his ability to read a Latin text aloud, even if he could not grasp its meaning. Now he was in the position of a mere child, awkwardly learning to pronounce words. He was anxious, however, to please his distinguished master, and desperately eager to increase his knowledge. Every morning (while Milton was dictating a poem which evidently he did not discuss with his student) Ellwood studied earnestly in his own chamber, with his own books; and every afternoon (no walks now for the blind bard) he went to the house in Jewin Street, hoping to evidence improvement. Milton gave him all the encouragement and all the help he could. Having a keen ear, the poet recognized from Ellwood's tone *all serious failures to understand the sense of something being read.* Frequently he interrupted his pupil, examined him, and explained difficult passages.

At the end of about six weeks of such training, Ellwood knew that he was making real progress; but then, unfortunately, his health failed. He was 'ill a considerable time', he later recalled, and he went to the country to recuperate. Upon returning to London, he 'was very kindly received' by Milton, who 'seemed heartily glad' to have him back. He felt, indeed, that the great man had at last conceived a good opinion of him and enjoyed his conversation. However this may be, the two resumed their former method of study, the young Quaker reading aloud, and Milton explaining as occasion required. The arrangement might have lasted indefinitely, to their mutual profit, had it not been for Ellwood's religion. Every Sunday, while Milton sat at home, worshipping God in his own way, his pupil went to the Quaker meeting-house at the Bull and Mouth in Aldersgate Street. On 26 October 1662 he and thirty-one others were arrested there, and taken to Bridewell prison. He was not released until early in February 1663; and although he called upon Milton promptly, and arranged to begin again after a short period of recuperation in Buckinghamshire, their peculiar relationship was destined to end. In Buckinghamshire, Ellwood was persuaded by his old friends the Peningtons to remain with them as a tutor to their three children.[58]

Milton himself left us no record of his thoughts or activities in the days when he knew Ellwood, and his early biographers chose to tell us but little. They were days when he was quite deliberately inconspicuous. Ellwood noted that the former Latin Secretary was living 'a private and retired life'; Marvell remarked that after the Restoration his famous friend 'expiated himself in a retired silence'.[59] We can only guess at Milton's feelings when events occurred that shocked or saddened other survivors of 'the Good Old Cause'. On 30 January 1661—the anniversary of King Charles the Martyr—the disinterred bodies of Bradshaw, Cromwell, and Ireton were drawn upon sledges to Tyburn, where they were pulled out of their coffins, hanged until sunset, then decapitated and thrown into a deep hole under the gallows. On 30 July 1661 the bishops were readmitted to the House of Lords for the first time since 1642, and it became a crime to write or speak against the established government. In September the corpses of about twenty men and women who had been buried in Westminster Abbey were dug up and thrown into a pit. By a Corporations Act of 20 December Parliament moved to eliminate all civic authorities not thoroughly cavalier in principles. On 19 May 1662 universal censorship of the press was re-established. Then, by an Act of Uniformity also dated 19 May, all clergymen, all university professors and authorities, all schoolmasters and private tutors in families were required to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant and to accept the liturgy of the Established Church before St. Bartholomew Sunday, 24 August. As a result of this last piece of legislation, approximately two thousand nonconformist clergymen suddenly left or were ejected from their livings.[60]

There were other events, of very personal significance to Milton, which might be noted in passing. In 1661 there were about half a dozen publications that probably brought him distress. His edition of *The Cabinet Council* was reprinted under a new title, *Aphorisms of State*, without his preface and with his name suppressed.[61] The hostile *Dignity of Kingship Asserted* was reissued as *Monarchy Triumphing over Traiterous Republicans*.[62] Ephraim Pagitt's *Heresiography*, with its several attacks on Milton as a 'Divorcer', went into a sixth edition.[63] A second edition of George Bate's *Elenchi Motuum Nuperorum in Anglia* added a passage vilifying the 'satires and libels' of the mercenary scrivener's son who had defended regicide with a 'livid and malicious wit'.[64] Milton may never have heard a similar attack by a German writer, Philipp von Zesen,[65] but he almost certainly had his attention called to a new ('second') edition of the still irritating *Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Coelum adversus Parricidas Anglicanos*.[66] Moreover, twice in January of 1662, his old enemy, Alexander Morus, newly arrived in London, preached in French before the King and Court at St. James's Chapel.[67] On 14 June 1662 Vane was executed on Tower Hill, and soon thereafter appeared a book entitled *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane*, a hastily written memorial published anonymously and containing, though with no indication of its authorship, Milton's sonnet of tribute to the parliamentary statesman.[68] On 21 October 1662 Henry Lawes died, and four days later was buried with honour in Westminster Abbey. It was on the day after his funeral that young Tom Ellwood was arrested, in one of countless actions by the new government against Quakers, Baptists, and other dissenting sects. On 30 January 1663, in a sermon before Charles II commemorating the anniversary of King Charles the Martyr, Robert South spoke of the rebels' 'Latin advocate, Mr. Milton, who like a blind adder has spit so much poison on the King's person and cause'.[69]

None of these events, we may be sure, added one whit to Milton's happiness or peace of mind. Late in December of 1662, however, there came lighter news from the home of Thomas Agar. Milton's niece, Anne, his sister's child, was to marry David Moore of Richmond, Surrey, a great grandson of Thomas More, secretary to Queen Anne Boleyn. Perhaps the blind man attended the wedding.[70]

It was about this time that he himself was considering the desirability of a third marriage. His three motherless daughters needed someone besides a servant to supervise their various activities. He could not do it; both his blindness and the demands of his work made it impossible. Anne was sixteen and a half, Mary was fourteen—each of them old enough to manage a household—yet the household was not being managed to Milton's satisfaction. His means had been painfully reduced by the Restoration; perhaps he could not afford a wife, even if he could persuade some gentlewoman to marry him. He had lost all of the £2,000 which he had saved out of his salary as Latin secretary; he had put it for security and improvement into the Excise bank, which failed with the collapse of the Commonwealth. Having neglected to recall the sum in time (how costly his political optimism!), he had since been unsuccessful in his attempts to recover it, despite, as his nephew said, 'all the power and interest he had in the great ones of those times'.[71] An estate of about £60 a year, which belonged to the Dean and chapter of Westminster, had also been taken away from him.[72] And that was not all: he had lost, we are told, 'another great sum, by mismanagement and for want of good advice'.[73] The scrivener's son was not good at handling money. He was fifty-four, and blind, and frugality in living had become a necessity instead of a principle. His daughters, however, seemed not to have grasped these facts. They needed a mother, and he needed a wife and good housekeeper. Yet he had little to offer except straitened security, and a good name, and affection if she were the right person.

His friend Dr. Paget evidently helped Milton to a decision. He introduced the poet to Miss Elizabeth Minshull, his own first cousin once removed. She was a woman of twenty-four, with red or golden hair, and with a quiet and agreeable disposition, capable no doubt of managing a home with firm efficiency. We do not know on what grounds Dr. Paget recommended her to Milton, and we do not know whether the marriage was a businesslike agreement between two mature people or an emotional product of considerable association and genuine liking. However, on 11 February 1663 Milton filed his formal intention of marriage, even venturing to sign the allegation with his own hand—a brave, sprawling signature. The wedding took place at St. Mary Aldermary on 24 February. The officiating minister was almost certainly Dr. Robert Gell, who had been a Fellow at Christ's College, Cambridge, when Milton was a student there.[74]

The new Mrs. Milton was evidently a sensible woman, with no fancy or extravagant notions. (The critical John Aubrey thought her 'a gentle person', of 'a peaceful and agreeable humour'.) Of yeoman stock, she had been born and reared in Wistaston, Cheshire, where her mother still lived and her brother Richard was a framework knitter. She was old enough to know what she was doing when she decided to become the wife of a blind scholar and the stepmother of three children. It is clear from subsequent events that she tried intelligently to make the marriage a success and that she learned quickly the peculiar likes and dislikes of her unusual husband. She discovered, for example, that he was very temperate in his eating and drinking, rarely taking wine between meals. Strong liquor he eschewed altogether. He preferred food most in season or easiest procured, and required little, 'but what he had, he always loved to have of the best'. It is likely that he early explained his tastes to her, for we know that she promised to provide him with 'such dishes' as he enjoyed as long as he lived. In later years, after a satisfying meal, he used to remind her, jokingly, of this promise, and praise her faithfulness to the contract.[75]

He called her 'Betty'. 'God have mercy, Betty!' he would exclaim when feeling particularly jovial. She was very kind, very thoughtful of him, and he learned to lean on her for many things. Waking in the morning he would sometimes ask her to write down perhaps twenty or thirty lines of poetry which had come to him. He would talk to her about his favourite English poets—Cowley, Shakespeare, Spenser, she later remembered—and about the authors who were becoming famous in the new world of Restoration literature. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, he acknowledged 'to be a man of great parts, a learned man', and yet he did not like him at all. 'Their interests and tenets were diametrically opposite.' Sir Robert Howard, the dramatist, he liked; and John Dryden, although Dryden was no poet —'a good rimist, but no poet'.[76]

Becoming acquainted with the house in Jewin Street of which she now was mistress, Elizabeth Milton observed many things which might have helped her to understand the man she had married. There were more books, probably, than she had ever seen before in her life. Her husband was not wealthy; he preached frugality as a virtue; yet there were two exceptions to his rule of economy: 'he was not sparing to buy good books' and he 'was generous in relieving the wants of his friends'.[77] She noticed his organ and other musical instruments, his swing, his favourite chair, his writing case and tobacco box, both of tortoise-shell.[78] She stood before the two portraits of him and studied them; she liked the one painted when he was a Cambridge scholar; it still resembled him, she thought.[79] She examined the coats of arms of his father and mother,[80] and his personal seal,[81] both of which had a spread eagle with two heads; and eventually she learned that he was born in a place in Bread Street called the Spread Eagle. All about her were many relics of the past in which she had not shared.[82]

Still in the house, of course, were three lively relics of that past; and from subsequent events we infer that the daughters of Mary Powell Milton did not take kindly to their second stepmother. Anne was already as old as her own mother had been when she married Milton; and her sister Mary was probably beginning to think of herself as no longer a child. Except for the brief time of their father's second marriage, the three girls had been motherless for almost eleven years, and their remaining parent had been too preoccupied with other matters to pay much attention to them. There were visits, perhaps, with their grandmother Powell; but most of their training had been entrusted to servants. None of them was ever sent to school; instead, they were taught at home by a mistress kept for that purpose.[83] Since their father's own education had begun in this way, doubtless he considered it appropriate for his daughters. It was expensive, however. Later, when he was disgusted with the results, and hurt by the unkindness of his children, he used to say that he 'had spent the greatest part of his estate in providing for them'.[84] According to his lights, he unquestionably provided for them; but the story or Milton and his three daughters is a sad story, vague in its chronology, sordid in some of its details, fragmentary and elusive in its essential facts. We do not know enough to assess blame. But we know enough to recognize familiar factors in human misunderstandings—selfishness, pettiness, resentment, and pride. Elizabeth Minshull aggravated a tension which had been growing for years, and she could not have been long in realizing her predicament.

What were the facts of the situation? Let us begin with one which Milton himself may have been slow in comprehending: the three daughters inherited neither the talents nor the intellectual aptitude of their father. They had the benefits of private tuition, but they seem to have profited little. Perhaps they were incapable of learning much; perhaps they were rebellious. In any case, Anne, the crippled one, seems not even to have learned to write her name. Her speech difficulty may have been regarded as an insuperable barrier to education; we do not know.[85] The other two daughters learned to read and write, and Deborah, late in her life, became a schoolmistress herself.[86] What they were taught, we do not know. Remembering Milton's own theories of education, his emphasis in actual practice upon rapid learning of many languages, and his natural eagerness to have his daughters serviceable to him in his blindness, we may reasonably infer that any tutor whom he employed to teach the girls was instructed to prepare them quickly in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and some modern foreign languages—just as John and Edward Phillips had been prepared. If such was the fact, we know that it resulted in failure—and some would add, 'of course'. Mary and Deborah were never able to understand books in foreign languages; this we hear from Deborah herself and from an independent source, although Milton himself seems to have tried to teach Deborah Latin.[87] It is also a fact, however—an often recorded fact which has puzzled some biographers and outraged others—that Mary and Deborah were able to read aloud from books in foreign languages and be intelligible to their father. They learned to pronounce words, not only in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish, but also in Greek and Hebrew, with their vastly different alphabets.[88] This extraordinary skill a blind man, no matter how patient or how anxious, could hardly have taught them. Moreover, the man whose need was so great that he suffered them to read to him thus blankly was the same man who in 1662 taught Ellwood Latin by stopping him whenever his voice betrayed lack of comprehension.

Let it be said, simply and without censure, that this sort of reading demanded great patience on both sides. We can be sure that Milton would not have endured it if more learned eyes had been at his disposal. Mary and Deborah endured it, we are told, 'for a long time'. We do not know when they started, but unless they were trained at different periods, it could hardly have been long before the third marriage, when Deborah was ten. There is evidence that by this time Mary had conceived a violent dislike for her father, and an unwelcome linguistic education in progress may have had much to do with it. We are told that when a maidservant informed Mary she had heard of Milton's approaching marriage, the daughter replied that it 'was no news, to hear of his wedding; but if she could hear of his death, *that* was something!' We are also told (in a context which refers the events to this same period) that 'all his said children did combine together and counsel his maidservant to cheat him in her marketings', and that 'his said children had made away with some of his books and would have sold the rest of his books to the dunghill women'. Milton, hard at work on his epic 'of man's first disobedience', heard these stories of spite and hatred, for his maidservant felt obliged to tell him.[89]

Eventually the new wife heard the stories too. We do not know what she did to remedy the situation, but it is a fact that the daughters continued to live under the parental roof for approximately six more years. It also seems to be a fact that, from time to time during this period, Milton found it necessary to ask Mary or Deborah to read to him in some foreign language. He must have realized their growing irritation at the task, but his need was desperate, and obedience to parents was ever a virtue. Alas for his later reputation and the understanding of posterity, he even had a little joke which he repeated whenever visitors remarked on the strangeness of reading so many languages without comprehending any. 'One tongue', he would say, 'is enough for a woman.'[90] It was a masculine jest, with centuries of satirical laughter behind it; but later ages, more conscious of woman's emancipation than of her traditional garrulity, have sometimes heard it with a literal mind. The cream of the jest is, of course, that Milton's facetious reply should have been remembered and recorded for posterity, and all his serious comments upon his daughters' education quickly forgotten. To compensate for this irony, let me make one observation and make it dogmatically: if either Mary or Deborah Milton had evidenced the slightest aptitude for languages and the slightest desire to learn, their father would have taught them. The admirer of Queen Christina, the friend of Lady Ranelagh and Lady Margaret Ley, was no advocate of ignorance in women.

Mercifully, Milton's third marriage and his troubles with his children seem to have attracted no public attention; he continued to live and work in comparative obscurity. After the flurry of published attacks at the time of the Restoration, his name appeared rarely in print. Sometimes he was simply listed along with a number of other Commonwealth men, as in Colonel Baker's *The Blazing-Star*, *or*, *Nolls Nose* (1660)[91] or Henry Foulis's *The History of the Wicked Plots* (1662),[92] where he was mentioned among 'Billingsgate authors'. His 'strain' of invective was also recalled, quite incidentally, in an attack on Thomas Newcomb, in *The London Printer*, *His Lamentation* (1660).[93] Roger L'Estrange struck at him at least once more, citing his *Tenure of Kings* several times in *Toleration Discuss'd* (1663).[94] Though the secret of the authorship of *Eikon Basilike* was now known to the Earl of Clarendon, who told Bishop John Gauden on 13 March 1662 that 'when it ceases to be a secret, I know nobody will be glad of it but Mr. Milton',[95] Richard Perrinchief revived in his introduction to *The Works of King Charles the Martyr* (1662) the old charge that Milton was hired 'to despoil the King of the credit of being the author of it'.[96] More revealing of Milton's status in this period is a book entitled *The Traytors Perspective-glass, or Sundry Examples of Gods just judgments executed upon many Eminent Regicides* (1662). Opposite the title page is a list of 'such Persons as are mentioned in the following Treatise'; but Milton's name is not there. Inside, his blindness and the burning of his books are mentioned as his (evidently sufficient) punishment.[97] A few foreign writers continued to discuss him in this period,[98] but the most non-committal allusion, and the one most prophetic of his next stage, was an advertisement of 'Milton's Masque' in a bookseller's catalogue.[99] It will be recalled that *Comus* had been published anonymously. Its author, identified as the blind republican, was now being offered to readers of Restoration literature. For these readers he was preparing something even more old-fashioned—and revolutionary. The vast epic on *Paradise Lost* was slowly taking shape. At some point not long after the Restoration he had been able to dictate, 'Half yet remains unsung', and, resolutely closing his ears to 'the barbarous dissonance / Of Bacchus and his revellers', he had addressed the heavenly Muse that continued to inspire him as he had undertaken to describe nothing less than the Creation of the world:

Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
And solitude; yet not alone while Thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the East. Still govern Thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few. [VII. 23–31]

# 14. Revival, 1663–1669

THERE were relatively few published allusions to Milton during the period we have now reached. His tribute to Shakespeare was reprinted in the third folio edition of the plays (1663–4) with neither his name nor his initials attached, though his initials had appeared in the 1640 *Poems.*[1] A second edition of James Heath's *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine Warr* (1663) made passing reference to the man ('since stricken with blindness') who had answered Salmasius and had written *Eikonoklastes* ('since deservedly burnt'). 'Thus', said the historian, Salmasius 'triumphed by the pen'.[2] *Cabala* (1663), a burlesque treatment of the defeated nonconformists, glanced once at Milton and Goodwin,[3] as did also Pierre Nicol's *The Pernicious Consequences of the New Heresie* (1666).[4] In *Considerations and Proposals in Order to the Regulation of the Press* (1663) Roger L'Estrange cited among 'treasonous and seditious pamphlets' Milton's as yet unpunished *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*—but without naming its author.[5] However, for seven consecutive years beginning in 1664, 'Blind Milton' was mentioned as a November joke in *Poor Robin*, a satiric almanac.[6] In 1668 David Lloyd recalled in pious *Memoires* that 'M.' had questioned the royal authorship of *Eikon Basilike*,[7] and the following year a reprint of John Wilkins's *Ecclesiastes* may have reminded some new readers that Milton was an advocate of divorce.[8] But that was all.

These few references in print probably did no harm, and may never have been reported to the blind poet. As the years passed, his misdeeds became a part of history, and men referred to them in footnote fashion, or mentioned them to prove a clever point. Writing his *Behemoth* about this time, Thomas Hobbes observed about the books of Milton and Salmasius: 'I have seen them both; they are very good Latin both, and hardly to be judged which is better; and both very ill reasoning, and hardly to be judged which is worst: like two declamations pro and con, for exercise only in a rhetoric school, by one and the same man—so like is a Presbyterian to an Independent.'[9] Writing without rancour, an historian noted in his 'Gesta Britannica' (unpublished) that Milton had once answered a tract by Archbishop Ussher.[10] With a foreigner's perspective, the Comte de Cominges wrote to King Louis XIV in 1663 that the arts and sciences had apparently passed from England to France, the vestiges in England being only in the memory of Bacon, More, Buchanan, and Milton.[11] What he did not know was that the man who had 'made himself more infamous by his dangerous writings than the executioners and assassins of their king' was labouring, now, to bring the arts back to the England that had sorely disappointed him.

The most fortunate single event in Milton's life was the event against which he had struggled most: the restoration of Charles II. Had it not come, we might never have received his greatest poems. Certainly we should never have received them in their present power and significance. This is not to say that the preceding twenty years were wasted years; they contributed importantly to the wisdom and artistry of his final creations; but they also developed certain dominant traits in Milton's character which threatened, not only the composition, but even the human value of the verse which, earlier in his career, he had resolved to leave to posterity.

Within Milton was the vast, ruthless energy of what we call the Renaissance, an energy which could and did shift its direction from time to time, but whatever way it moved, bowed everything before it. He probably wrote so much about the virtues of temperance because, in some respects, he had so little. He was an extremist, a perfectionist; he had a one-track mind. He also had a genuine talent (God-given, he sincerely believed) for the vigorous, vituperative give-and-take of controversy. His 'bad manners' in debate were not, of course, unique; they were his heritage as a child of his age; but he took his heritage, unsheathed it, sharpened it, and wielded it so enthusiastically that his own contemporaries found his language unusual, and today his more squeamish admirers avert their eyes from the unpleasant spectacle. He could, and did, justify himself; and viewing his practice historically or, some would agree, ethically, we cannot condemn him. Nevertheless, there is significance in his calling one of the leading scholars of Christendom (and a man he was proud to meet in argument) a monster, madman, liar, buffoon, pimp, parasite, and filthy swine. With these epithets Milton was not only voicing his hatred of an embodiment of falsehood and tyranny; he was also revealing a nature over-strong in combativeness. The replies, of course, were almost as harrowing, for Milton spat into a strong wind. And discovering what he had done, he spat again.

Today, looking down the cool corridor of history, we can discuss dispassionately Milton's theories of religion and government; but Milton, while expressing those theories, was smelling blood. There was a chip on the sturdy shoulder of his prose, a fanatic challenge in his ideas, an invitation to battle in his choice of subjects. Like the preacher in Shaw's *Devil's Disciple*, he suddenly found another calling, not merely expedient, but much to his taste; he doffed the gracious robes of poetry and descended into the arena. Disillusion and disappointment stopped him but temporarily;

with his two-handed engine he struck once—and then continued to strike long after striking was useless. One admires his courage in publishing the revised *Ready and Easy Way* within the very month that Charles was invited home; blessed with perspective one may praise this tract for its almost prophetic conception of an aristocratic democracy; but in publishing it he did not spit against the wind—he spat into the everlasting sea. Still, it was typical of the man; he loved an unequal struggle. If England had not positively tired of a Commonwealth, Milton might have gone on and on quarrelling with human nature, planning utopias, and defending himself against the mud he was throwing at others.

The Restoration changed all that. It changed it because it came with a unanimity that even Milton realized could not be resisted. The return of Charles resulted, therefore, in Milton's forcible restoration to his own destiny. The same power that disinterred Cromwell and Bradshaw, only to disgrace the remains, unwittingly disinterred the buried spirit of poetry in Milton, to revive and, eventually, to honour it. The blind man had done his patriotic best for the people of England, and the people had expressed their will, clearly, inexorably. As he had said in *Eikonoklastes*: 'in some things to be overcome is more honest and laudable than to conquer.'[12] Divinest Melancholy came to him, uninvoked; but she brought with her retired Leisure.

So far as we know, Milton's ideas did not greatly change after 1660, but surely they acquired depth and overtones they had lacked before. He was late in maturing, as he himself realized and confessed, but he was even later than he thought. There is a facile idealism, an unrealistic conception of human nature, in much of his prose which hardly seems to promise a great poet. Read at a distance of centuries, and removed from political and literary astigmatism, the early Milton is a high-minded and a plausible young man; but if we look beyond the great quotable passages, and close our ears to the background of familiar organ music, we find much to remind us that for thirty-three years (about half of his days upon this earth) he had tasted life from a silver spoon. If Milton, in order to be Milton, needed the vast illumination of a major disillusion, needed the terrible fire that turns knowledge into wisdom, then the Restoration provided it.

Of course he had learned wisdom before. Life had been teaching him in the fashion it teaches ordinary men—through Mary Powell, through the scandal produced by the divorce tracts, through the Presbyterians, through the death of his only son, through Cromwell's dictatorship, through the deaf ears of Parliament and General Monk in those last eventful months before the end. Indeed, if one reads closely, one detects a gradually increasing realism in the pamphlets and in the poems. In Everyman's youth all things are either black or white; slowly there is recognition of grey. Nevertheless, in respect of some of life's major lessons, Milton remained as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye: uncompromising, romantic in his views, egocentric and eager with his pen. Strong religious conviction strengthened an impervious optimism; even the curse of blindness became a mild yoke imposed by a wise Providence. But after the Restoration, faith, removed from the hothouse, took new root and grew strong in the rich soil of reality. Milton remained hopeful to the last, but it was finally a hope conceived in painful knowledge of man's weakness, life's irony, and the inscrutable ways of God. Although the theological problems of the Fall had long fascinated him, the epic finished after 1660 has a 'new acquist of true experience from this great event' which makes it more than a masterpiece of language and technique, more than a fabulous mine of learning.

These are generalities. What exactly, one may ask, did Milton learn? What did twenty years of struggle, crowned so tragically, teach him about God and man? The answer of course is contained in the great poems, and if one wishes to know that answer in its subtlety and its totality, there is no substitute for thoughtful reading of Milton's words. A critic explaining a work of art is like a returned traveller discoursing on distant lands: the talk may be edifying, even exciting; but we have not been anywhere, we have not seen anything. We must journey ourselves in the golden realms, remembering that the true meaning and value of a poem lie, not in the words that can be paraphrased, but in the intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic whole. When this is remembered, a guidebook has its values, and appreciation can be both quickened and informed by a prosaic analysis of Milton's ideas in his epic.

One of the dominant ideas of *Paradise Lost*, emphasized by its explicit statement near the end, is that 'tyranny must be', 'true liberty' having been lost to the human race since Adam's 'original lapse' from 'right reason'. Every individual repeats the story of the Fall:

> Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,
> Immediately inordinate desires
> And upstart passions catch the government
> From reason, and to servitude reduce
> Man till then free. Therefore since he permits
> Within himself unworthy powers to reign
> Over free reason, God in judgement just
> Subjects him from without to violent lords . . . (XII. 86–93)

Sometimes, declares the disillusioned poet, whole nations

> will decline so low
> From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
> But justice and some fatal curse annexed
> Deprives them of their outward liberty,
> Their inward lost. (XII. 97–101)

What recourse then, what comfort, to the regenerate man, to the Christian who sincerely repents his own fall? Is there no hope? Is paradise for ever lost? Milton gives, not one, but two answers to these questions. First, 'so shall the world go on, to good malignant, to bad men benign', until the Second Coming of Christ, when there will at last be 'respiration to the just, and vengeance to the wicked'. Then, the poet assures us (with the timeless comfort of orthodoxy), 'the earth shall all be paradise, far happier place than this of Eden'; and we can meanwhile take comfort in contemplation of the goodness infinite 'that all this good of evil *shall* produce, and evil turn to good'. But we can do more—and this is Milton's second, more personal answer. Although 'true liberty is lost', the individual, *here and now*, can 'possess a paradise within'. In order to do so, he must learn what Adam learned, what the epic teaches:

> that to obey is best,
> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in His presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on Him sole depend,
> Merciful over all His works, with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for Truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory,
> And to the faithful, death the gate to Life . . . (XII. 561–71)

Having learned these timeless things—'the sum of wisdom'—he must then add

> Deeds to thy knowledge answerable—add faith;
> Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,
> By name to come called charity, the soul
> Of all the rest . . . (XII. 582–5)

Such, Milton affirms, is the true secret of human happiness.

The emphasis of this affirmation is upon the individual Christian. The poet holds out no hope for the freeing of nations; his experience had taught him otherwise. Man as a member of society must for ever suffer tyranny in some form or other. But man, alone with his Maker, can create a paradise in his own heart. God is truly just to the human race because, although not now, eventually the wicked will be punished and the good rewarded. God is just to the individual because, although evil flourishes without, the way is ever open to happiness within.

Milton's belief in the *essential inwardness* of religious experience had not changed since the days of his first adult objections to Roman Catholicism as he understood it, and his subsequent attack on externality in Episcopal government; but the implications of this life-long belief had changed greatly with changing events. He once felt that sweeping reformation was a probability. Convinced that external liberty (freedom from political or ecclesiastical tyranny) was a natural product of inner liberty in a people (virtue achieved through rational choosing and obedience to God), the supporter of Smectymnuus grew optimistic as he observed the popular agitation for church reform swiftly result in the actual overthrow of the bishops. When he urged further reforms—of divorce laws, of education, of censorship—he was severely rebuffed; and, withdrawing for a time from public controversy, he concluded that inner liberty was lacking in the people. The small amount of external liberty achieved was already perverted, in his opinion; the wastefulness of the long war made him cynical about force as a means of winning freedom, and the political corruption in his own party persuaded him that strong, enlightened leaders were needed. He was prompted to tell General Fairfax so, in a sonnet.

Then, Pride's Purge, the abrupt execution of the King, and the dramatic establishment of a Republic by an aggressive minority shook his opinions, revived his natural optimism, but confronted him with a dilemma. Can a few people, through force, *confer* external liberty upon an unwilling and unworthy nation? He soon resolved this dilemma by inferring the hand of God in the affair, assuming that the enlightened few possessed inner liberty, and deciding that at least the opportunity for external liberty could be thus presented to a whole nation. If the whole nation acquired inner liberty or virtue, stirred by the providential challenge, the external liberty could be preserved and nurtured. When the people failed to rise to their great opportunity, when the republican experiment crumpled and power fell into the hands of one man, Milton clung tenaciously to his hopefulness, feeling that Cromwell was not a tyrant, but, rather, a God-sent leader and champion who himself possessed inner liberty. For a time it seemed to the poet, therefore, that Providence had once again prolonged the opportunity of the English people to hold their freedom by first deserving it. When he began *Paradise Lost*, during the closing years of the Commonwealth, he probably envisaged the epic as a parable on mankind's gift, through divine grace, of a *second chance*, and on the need for learning how to put first things first. Then came the Restoration, and the end of a dream. 'True liberty is lost'—the fact of human history had to be faced. But man need not commit the sin of despair. Unspeakably disappointed, but struggling for composure, Milton wove into his poem a bitterly hopeful theme. The inwardness of religious experience, he assured his readers, offers the only lasting joy in a world of woe and death. This final word of the epic was determined, not by anything in the biblical story, not by artistic necessity, probably not by any major idea of the poem as planned, but rather by the profound needs of its author's spirit and the dictates of his deepened wisdom.

*Paradise Lost* is an epic based on a brief, simple story assumed to be literally true. Some readers, learning this, decide at once that Milton is for the dustbin of superstitions and outmoded ideas. They dismiss him by asking, 'How can any intelligent person believe in Hell and Original Sin?' Now, what is chiefly wrong with such readers is not their religion or their lack of religion. It is not even that they are depriving themselves of purely aesthetic pleasures which can be had without giving intellectual assent. What is chiefly wrong with such readers is that they are not sophisticated enough. They should pause to ask why Milton, actually believing in the stories of Adam and Eve and the fallen angels, dared to retell those familiar stories on such a vast scale that most of what was said *had to become sheer fiction* of a highly imaginative sort. He did so, of course, because what most concerned him about those primitive tales was, not their truth, but the truths to be inferred from them. He saw them essentially as fascinating parables, teaching the basic facts of morality and man's spiritual life, offering answers to the searching questions which all human beings, then or now, for ever ask themselves. Hence Milton nowhere insists that we accept as real his elaborately imagined Adam, but his whole story of Adam tries to persuade us that we should put love of God before even the noblest and most idealistic love of man for his wife. Did Milton believe in a real Hell and a real, historical Eden? What difference does any answer to this question make? What matters is Satan's anguished 'Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell'. What matters is Adam's discovery, on leaving a richly imagined Paradise, that he can yet possess 'a paradise within'.

Like Socrates and Jesus, Milton teaches by parable, memorably and delightfully. Unlike these predecessors, but like Dante, he gives his parable staggering dimensions and unfolds it in poetry of great beauty and power. We do not have to agree with what is taught, but can folly go further than turning a deaf ear to such an eloquent attempt to answer fundamental questions? Can we learn only from those whose basic assumptions are identical with our own? Or can we, perhaps, learn something from those whose experience of life has been richer than, or at the least different from, our own?

*Paradise Lost* is, from the outset, admittedly didactic—but with a difference. It rarely preaches, rarely argues. 'This great argument' is for Milton 'this significant story' which not only illustrates the justice and mercy of a God whose existence is simply assumed, but also shows human beings how they, too, here and now, can achieve an inner paradise. If, finally, Milton's answers to the fundamental questions turn out to be familiar and orthodox, his way of presenting those answers is neither. He chose not to write a sermon or a treatise. Reduce to prose the old truths he chose to re-present, and much of his meaning goes out of them. That meaning resides, in part, in the epic panorama, the resonant verse paragraphs, the archetypal imagery, the complex motivation of the main characters, the constant echoes of Hebraic and classical culture, and the occasional glimpses of a great man's reactions to his own life and troubled times. Although the poem is inescapably theological, if we concentrate on Milton's avowed effort to justify God's ways to men, we are in some danger of not recognizing that this process involves, necessarily, explaining *the ways of men* (and women)—their relations to each other, their intellectual curiosity, their motivations to sin, their rationalizations after lapses. The human, psychological validity of these analyses gives the poem genuine interest and importance even to those readers who cannot accept its theology or are perhaps offended by its literal use of Scripture.

And there are endless subtleties. When God says, 'Man falls deceived / By the other first; man therefore shall find grace' (III. 130–1), this sounds simpler than it turns out to be in Milton's full narrative. The rebel angels also deceived by the 'other' do not find grace. Eve *was* deceived, by Satan; but Adam was deceived neither by Satan nor by Eve. Like Satan, he disobeyed with full awareness of his sin, and, unlike Satan, he had been forewarned of the consequences. Yet he, with Eve, finds grace. Why? Was it because Eve, by being tempted, had won grace for both of them? Or was it rather, or also, that Adam's sin was different in kind from the pride and ambition which Satan and Eve had exhibited? His sin was remissness, a failure to govern a natural inferior, a deliberate, if only momentary, exalting of human love above love of (hence obedience to) God. This was Milton's interpretation. Did the poet feel that this was a weakness deserving of divine forgiveness? Free will, he assures us, was given God's creatures so that they might love God freely. Love is the key to all harmony and happiness. Adam had love for God and love for the almost perfect helpmate whom God had given him; but, faced suddenly with the prospect of losing that helpmate, he failed for the first time to put love of God first, preferring a fellow creature to the Creator who had wanted love. There was no malice in this sin, nor was there pride or ambition. God had given him Eve, and had given him the emotion that made him willing to share her punishment. To decide so was impiety, but it was strikingly like the equally prompt decision of the Messiah to share the sufferings of the human race—also to the death.

* * *

We do not know when *Paradise Lost* was completed in first draft. John Aubrey, depending upon the often unreliable memory of Edward Phillips, noted that it was 'finished about three years after the King's Restoration'.[13] What seems to have been a complete manuscript was certainly shown to Ellwood in the summer of 1665. But the poem was not printed until the summer of 1667, and, so thorough was Milton's retirement from the world of affairs, we know almost nothing of his activities during the four years preceding publication. Phillips was no longer near him; on 24 October 1663 he arrived at Sayes Court at Deptford in Essex, as we learn from an entry in the diary of John Evelyn: 'Mr. Edward Phillips came to be my son's preceptor. This gentleman was nephew to Milton who writ against Salmasius's *Defensio*, but not at all infected with his principles, and though brought up by him, yet no way tainted.'[14] At thirty-three the poet's former pupil had elaborately achieved political respectability, we gather. At fifty-four Milton still carried the brand of his principles.

Yet there is a story, probably true, that Cromwell's Latin Secretary was actually visited 'by a chief officer of state, and desired to employ his pen on their behalf'. In the three different versions of the incident that have come down to us quite independently, there are no dates mentioned, and no names; but one version is from Milton's own widow, who was 'wont' to say 'that her husband was applied to by message from the King, and invited to write for the Court'. We may doubt the specific detail (by Richardson, through Henry Bendish) that 'the King offered to employ this pardoned man as his Latin Secretary'; but we can hardly doubt that some high official came to Milton with the suggestion that he write on some subject in defence of the new government's position.[15] The blind republican refused, of course. Such behaviour, he declared, would be very inconsistent with his former conduct. (Power, privilege, wealth—these did not make for a paradise within. There must be no compromising with the forces of evil.)

In the summer, autumn, and winter of 1665 London was afflicted with a terrible plague. In the first week of September 1666 the city was razed by an even more terrible fire. To many pious Englishmen the wrath of God was apparent in these disasters. What Milton thought, what anxiety he felt, we can only guess. We have but fleeting glimpses of him during these two years of dread and desolation.

It was late in April of 1665 that the red-spot pestilence first aroused the fears of Londoners. During May the mortality rate rose steadily, and in June, when 590 deaths were reported, all persons of means were planning to leave the stricken city. On 7 June ('the hottest day that ever I felt in my life', wrote Pepys in his diary) Milton sold to Dr. Baldwin Hamey a mortgage on property in Kensington which he had held as an investment since 14 January 1658. He received £500 in cash (his original loan on the mortgage), and we infer that he was preparing for any sudden emergency.[16] Houses in London were already being marked with a red cross upon the doors, and with the eloquent words, 'Lord have mercy on us.'

It so happened that in June young Tom Ellwood, at his father's urgent request, visited London in order to sign some legal documents; and his business finished, he called upon Milton in Jewin Street. The blind man was anxious about the safety of his family and himself. Could Ellwood rent for him some house, some temporary refuge, in the neighbourhood of Chalfont St. Peter, where the Peningtons lived? The kindly Quaker promised to do his best, and returning to the country—about twenty-three miles from London—he took what he later described as 'a pretty box' for his friend in the nearby parish of Chalfont St. Giles, about a mile from 'the Grange', the Penington residence. Late in June he notified Milton that the cottage was available, and soon after the first of July the Milton family moved.[17]

The young man who had been so helpful in arranging for their safety was not there to greet them. On 1 July he and Isaac Penington had journeyed to Amersham to assist in the burial of a fellow Quaker, and once more they had been arrested. It was not until August—when more than 20,000 died of the pestilence in London—that Ellwood, again at liberty, called upon Milton. After they had talked about various matters for a while, the blind man asked someone to bring him a certain bulky manuscript and, giving it to Ellwood, he told his former student to take it home with him, read it at his leisure, and then return it with his critical opinion of its value.

It was the manuscript of *Paradise Lost*. Impressed by the deference apparently shown his judgement, Ellwood read the long poem and, after he had finished it, made another visit and returned the manuscript with due acknowledgement of the favour done him by the author. Milton asked him how he liked it and what he thought of it. By Ellwood's own later report on the incident, he 'modestly but freely told him'. Indeed, after they had discussed the poem for a time, the serious-minded young Quaker ventured a suggestion. 'Thou hast said much here of paradise lost', he declared, 'but what hast thou to say of paradise found?' Milton did not answer. For 'some time' there was silence, Ellwood wondering, perhaps, whether he had somehow offended his distinguished friend. When finally the poet spoke again, it was to change the subject completely.[18]

Our sole authority for this tale is Ellwood himself, who was completely, even painfully, honest, if not very imaginative or very perceptive. It is quite clear how he later interpreted Milton's silence: he felt that he had given the poet an absorbing idea, and that Milton had at once lost himself in thoughts of a possible sequel to his epic. What the humourless young Quaker failed to realize, in his eager excursion into literary criticism, is that *Paradise Lost* (at least in its printed version) has a number of very pointed and eloquent things to say of 'paradise found'. We may conjecture, therefore, that the poet's silence was compounded of disappointment and moody self-criticism. Had he failed to communicate his belief in a 'paradise within', or was Ellwood merely a careless reader? Ellwood was, of course, an intelligent, earnest Christian; he had suffered much because of his religion; he was the sort of person for whom the poem had been composed. Milton had entrusted the precious manuscript to his care and perusal, partly because he was grateful to the young man, but also, we may suppose, because the devout Quaker's response might show to what extent the epic spoke to Christians of all faiths. Did the very nature of the story of the Fall, with its necessary stress upon the sin of disobedience, obscure the present and future rewards of virtue? Was the poem, because of its material, negative rather than positive in emphasis? Could *any* poem artistically illustrate the possibility of a 'paradise within'? These questions, and others like them, may have passed through Milton's mind as he sat quietly in his cottage at Chalfont, while Tom Ellwood, his hat on his head and another 'Thou' on the tip of his tongue, considered breaking the awkward silence—and decided against it.

During September the plague reached its ghastly height in London, with 26,230 reported dead. Even at Chalfont St. Giles there were a few casualties among the 400 and some residents, and the bells of the village church were an ominous sound over the hum of bees. Suffering of another sort added to the general uncertainty; during September Isaac Penington was once more arrested as a Quaker, and his whole family, including Ellwood, were turned out of their house. Mary Penington went first with her younger children to be close to her husband in the prison at Aylesbury; but later they took lodgings in a farmhouse near Milton at Chalfont St. Giles. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the poet went occasionally to console them, when the weather permitted walking. It is even possible that he remembered the pleasant scenery of this particular part of Buckinghamshire, for Horton was only thirteen or so miles to the south, and he had walked much in his younger days.[19]

'After the sickness was over', Ellwood tells us, 'and the city well cleansed and become safely habitable again', Milton returned to his house in Jewin Street. This could hardly have been before 1 February 1666, when the King and the Duke of York returned to town. On 6 February Evelyn noted in his diary that the pestilence was 'now almost universally ceasing'. Londoners, slowly recovering from the disaster, concerned themselves with such gruesome business as covering the churchyards with lime and enclosing with a brick wall the promiscuous plague-pit in Bunhill Fields. We may be sure that Milton, who lived not far from this emergency burial-ground for plague victims, soon was told many stories of its horrible uses, and probably heard, as Defoe did later, that 'many who were infected, and near their end, and delirious also, ran wrapped in blankets or rags and threw themselves in, and expired there before any earth could be thrown upon them'. In no other section of the city were the death-cart and the death-bell a more incessant sight and sound. Milton felt that his refuge in the country had been prepared for him by the very grace of God.[20]

He expressed this pious conviction in a letter which he dictated on 15 August 1666. Indeed, it seemed to him that his life and health had been spared for some task yet remaining for him to perform to God's glory. He had felt encouraged, perhaps, by a friendly letter received from a former admirer, Peter Heimbach. This young German, who had been close to Milton in 1656 and who was now risen to be counsellor to the Elector of Brandenburg for the Duchy of Cleves, had heard rumours of Milton's death during the plague but, learning later that the rumours were false, he had written on 27 May/8 June to express his relief and best wishes for the Englishman's long life and happiness. Having heard also of Milton's seclusion after the Restoration, he had supposed his old friend to be saying, like Simeon, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.' Such a wish, he urged, was contrary to his own; Milton should continue active and pre-eminent in the world of humane letters.[21]

In replying to this heart-warming plea, the poet said nothing of his recently completed epic. He acknowledged that his escape from the plague had been providential, and hoped that the rumour in Germany of his death had sprung from some general concern for his welfare. As for the extravagant compliments which Heimbach had included in his letter, they suggested, Milton said modestly, that after so long a time the young man did not remember him very clearly. Heimbach had avouched his undiminished admiration for the union in Milton of many different virtues: 'You have achieved a blending, altogether rare and beyond the deserving of the age, of grave dignity . . . with the most unruffled courtesy, of charity with sound judgement, of piety with policy, of policy with boundless learning, and, I shall add, of a high-minded and far from timid spirit (even when younger men were faltering) with a genuine love of peace.' No doubt pleased by this eloquent tribute, Milton was half-serious, half-humorous in his acknowledgement: 'I should dread too large a family as a product of so many marriage-unions if it were not common knowledge that virtues grow and flourish best in poverty and hardships. I may say that one of the virtues on your list has not requited me very handsomely for my hospitality; for the virtue you call *policy* (but which I would rather have you call *loyalty to my country*), after captivating me with her fair-sounding name, has almost left me without a country, so to speak. But the chorus of the others makes a very fine harmony. One's country is wherever it is well with one.' After this sadly whimsical observation, he closed by expressing his pleasure that the promise he had recognized in Heimbach as a young man was now being fulfilled and rewarded.[22]

On 15 August, when he dictated this letter, he had found it necessary to use an amanuensis utterly ignorant of Latin, and considerably to his annoyance he had been obliged to spell out the letters of the words one by one as the boy (not one of his daughters) wrote them down. He asked Heimbach, therefore, to overlook any faults in spelling or punctuation which had crept in. Try as he might, he could not completely accustom himself to these petty reminders of his dependence, of his separation from the normal world of affairs. That night, as he lay in his bed, he could hear the cannon in the Tower boom, celebrating the news of the burning of a Dutch town and 160 ships. He knew that there were probably bonfires in the streets.[23]

On Sunday, 2 September 1666, between one and two o'clock in the morning, the Great Fire of London awakened the sleeping city; and for three terrible days and nights men, women, and children huddled on the edge of the ever-widening furnace, watching their homes and churches being reduced to ashes. The blind poet, living just beyond the city walls, could hear the commotion and smell the destruction, but the full horror of the disaster he could see only through the eyes of others. To his intense relief he eventually learned that the fire had been stopped on the north by the city wall and ditch; his own residence was safe. But two-thirds of old London was a black chaos of charred walls, smoking timber, and rubbish. More than eighty churches and 11,000 dwelling-houses had perished. Gone, too, were most of the familiar public buildings, including the massive landmark that had been St. Paul's. Milton's birthplace, the Spread Eagle in Bread Street, was of course consumed in the holocaust, as was the Rose on the same street, which he had once held as an investment. The moments of helpless anxiety which he endured while the conflagration spread toward the suburbs to the north—these we can scarcely imagine.[24]

During the black winter which followed, Parliament concerned itself with measures for the repair of the ruined city; and there were bills for the relief of the homeless, bills for rebuilding, bills for the settling of claims and disputes. In some parts of the devastated area smoke was still visible as late as the middle of March, six months after the fire had been brought under control.[25]

The year following the Great Fire was a year of notable endings and beginnings. Soon after the war with the Dutch concluded, and New York became English, the bright star of Clarendon dropped below the political horizon. In 1667 Wither, Cowley, and Jeremy Taylor died. In 1667 Swift and Arbuthnot were born. The court of Charles, quickly recovered from the sobering effects of the flaming city, chuckled once more at the escapades of rakes and applauded the plays of Davenant and Dryden. In this year, too, Milton published *Paradise Lost*.

He obtained a licence or imprimatur from one of the official censors, the Reverend Thomas Tomkyns, domestic chaplain to Gilbert Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury, and also rector of St. Mary Aldermary since the death of Robert Gell in March 1665. Milton may have experienced some delay in securing permission to print his epic. If we may believe Toland, writing in 1698, the licenser, 'among other frivolous exceptions, would needs suppress the whole poem for imaginary treason in the following lines':

> As when the sun new risen
> Looks through the horizontal misty air

> Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon
> In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
> On half the nations, and with fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs. [I. 594-9]

This passage seems innocent enough; but it would be little wonder if Tomkyns, with the responsibility of approving the first book in seven years by the notorious Milton, had searched nervously for subversive sentiments. In any case, and whatever his additional 'frivolous exceptions' may have been, he was finally reassured. Perhaps some of Milton's friends took a hand in the dispute, if dispute there really was.[26]

The poet faced also the problem of finding a publisher. The Great Fire had almost ruined the book trade in London, but there were a few men, fortunate enough to have set up business beyond the doomed area, who promptly offered the reading public such non-inflammable books as Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, the *Collected Works* of 'the Matchless Orinda', Laud's *Sum of Devotions*, and Dryden's *Indian Emperor* and *Annus Mirabilis*. Milton might have gone to the fashionable publisher Henry Herringman, whose shop was in the Strand, or he might have gone to his own former printer Thomas Newcomb. Instead, he went to the widow and nephew of his old friend Matthew Simmons, who had published many of his writings from 1643 to 1650, and who had died in 1654. The Simmons printing establishment, next door to the Golden Lion in nearby Aldersgate Street, had not been touched by the fire. Mrs. Mary Simmons had kept the business going since the death of her husband, and about 1662 she had been joined by her nephew, Samuel, who helped her print parts of Joseph Caryl's *Exposition* on the Book of Job, and who also started printing independently. Although Milton negotiated with young Simmons about the publication of *Paradise Lost*, it is not unlikely that Mrs. Simmons was consulted about the arrangements.[27]

The formal contract between author and publisher was signed on 27 April 1667. It provided for the immediate payment to Milton of £5, and the future payment of another £5 when a first edition of 1,300 copies had been sold. If a second edition or a third edition seemed called for, the poet would receive an additional £5 upon the successful marketing of 1,300 copies of each. None of these editions was to exceed 1,500 copies. Beyond these possibilities of profit, Milton surrendered all future rights in his poem to Simmons or his assignees. He stood to make £20 if his book was unusually popular. The agreement was normal enough—perhaps even generous on Simmons's part, for he was taking a big chance in publishing 1,500 copies of a poem on an unstylish subject, in an unstylish literary form, by an author who was still anathema to a multitude of people. At fifty-eight Milton was probably pleased to be able to put his seal to such a contract, and to stand by while one John Fisher and his own servant, Benjamin Greene, witnessed his assent.[28]

Thanks to Harris Fletcher's meticulous examination of 146 copies of the first edition—nearly half of those surviving—we know now that the printing of *Paradise Lost* was a much less complicated process than had once been suspected (and sometimes positively asserted). As the book went through the press, changes in type were made on only sixteen of the eighty-six formes, although it was later found expedient to reprint two signatures and to produce different title pages.[29] It may have taken seven or eight weeks to compose and correct the type for the entire work. After a forme was completely printed the type was distributed, to be used again by the compositor in later formes, and the fully printed sheets were put aside in piles. Twelve of these piles contained both corrected and uncorrected sheets. Therefore, when the last forme was printed and the book was put together, it followed that any given copy might contain any possible combination of corrected and uncorrected signatures, regardless of title-page date or presence or absence of preliminary matter.

*Paradise Lost* was registered by Simmons on 20 August[30] (the day on which Pepys went to see *Sir Martin Mar-all* for the third time), and the book was on sale, probably at three shillings a copy,[31] soon thereafter. There is evidence that the publisher was nervous, and continued nervous for a time, about the whole venture. Though the poem had been duly licensed, Simmons noted its author as 'J. M.' (initials only) when he registered it. During the sale of the first edition of no more than 1,500 copies, he printed six different title pages, two each dated 1667, 1668, and 1669. What seem to have been the first three of these six title pages omit Simmons's name as publisher, but declare prominently that the book was 'Licensed and Entered according to Order'. This notice was dropped when Simmons finally ventured to include his name in the imprint. One of those early title pages (1668) contains Milton's initials instead of his name. All in all, copies of the first edition were advertised as obtainable from six different booksellers,[32] a rather large number for a book of poetry which had yet to find an audience, especially since Simmons himself was a bookseller as well as a printer. We may guess that the publisher was relieved to learn that a volume bearing the notorious name of John Milton could actually be offered for sale with impunity.[33]

Critics have often remarked that *Paradise Lost* 'was most unfortunate in the time of its appearance', and, properly qualified, the observation is true. Nevertheless, it is interesting now to speculate on what would have been the fate of the poem if it had been published in the period 1640–60, when educated men were thinking, not of heroic verse, but of heroic deeds. True, a handful of minor poets seemed to thrive in, or in spite of, that clamorous atmosphere; but an epic on the Creation would probably have been lost in Babel. After all, Milton did publish verse in 1645; but it was during the Restoration that he first, as a poet, found an enthusiastic audience. The literary taste of his readers was not Milton's literary taste, but that is comparatively unimportant; the important fact is that literary taste had become again a reality, a subject to be argued, a force to be felt. Some Restoration readers found in Milton the charm of contrast—as eighteenth-century readers were later to find. He seemed an exception, solitary and rather magnificent, to a recent modish rule. But others heard in him the authentic voice of genius.

For evidently the epic sold. On 26 April 1669—almost precisely two years after the signing of the contract—Simmons paid the second £5 to his author (almost enough to repaint a gentleman's coach), and presumably 1,300 copies of the book had been bought by readers, fit or unfit, satisfied or unsatisfied.[34] Meanwhile, both Simmons and Milton had learned some things about publishing a very long poem in blank verse. Within seven months after the registration of the work, this note had been added to copies for sale: '*The Printer to the Reader*: Courteous reader, there was no argument at first intended to the book, but for the satisfaction of many that have desired it, I have procured it, and withal a reason of that which stumbled many others, why the poem rimes not. *S. Simmons.*' This significant admission introduces fourteen pages of new matter, comprising a short list of *errata*, prose summaries of each of the ten books of the epic, and the following vigorous defence of 'The Verse' by the author:

> The measure is English heroic verse without rime, as that of Homer in Greek and of Virgil in Latin, rime being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse (in longer works especially), but the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame metre—graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise (and for the most part worse) than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause, therefore, some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rime both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself to all judicious ears trivial and of no true musical delight (which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory). This neglect, then, of rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming.[35]

The belligerent tone of this manifesto is explainable on several counts. Milton was always combative when forced to defend a position taken, and he probably felt some irritation over the objections voiced by 'vulgar readers'. He was ready to justify the ways of God to men, but it annoyed him to have to justify his own poetry to anyone. He had written, as he plainly announced, for fit audience though few. There were other reasons, however, for the marked pugnacity of this paragraph, as the gratuitous comment on 'our best English tragedies' suggests. By praising blank verse in drama he was opposing a position taken by one of his very first teachers, Alexander Gill, senior. Moreover, Milton had published his blank verse epic in the midst of a public controversy between John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard over the merits of rime.[36]

Dryden had argued for rimed verse in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, but we are told that when he discovered *Paradise Lost* he exclaimed, 'This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too!'[37] Sir Robert Howard had argued for blank verse, and it was perhaps at this time that he became Milton's 'particular acquaintance'. Neither Dryden nor Howard referred to Milton or to the epic in their various critical pronouncements at the time, yet in the talk among their readers it was inevitable that *Paradise Lost* should be cited.

To whom belongs the credit of first recognizing the greatness of Milton's poem? Davenant, who may have received a presentation copy, died on 7 April 1668 without leaving any opinion. Sir John Denham, who died on 19 March 1669, is supposed (in a tradition that came to Richardson from Sir George Hungerford) to have discovered it early and pronounced it 'the noblest poem that ever was wrote in any language or in any age'.[38] According to another tradition (recorded also in 1734 by Richardson, who had it then from Dr. Tancred Robinson, who had heard it from Sir Fleetwood Sheppard), 'the book was unknown' until 1669, when Lord Buckhurst discovered it and called it to Dryden's attention.[39] Both these stories have an apocryphal ring. We are on safer ground if we remember that the epic was registered on 20 August 1667, and that 1,300 copies of the first edition were sold by 26 April 1669.

As we speculate on the poem's earliest readers,[40] is it unreasonable to suppose that one of them was Milton's own brother? Christopher continued to live in Ipswich, but came to London to practise law during term. In 1664 he was attendant to Thomas Foster and to Sir Richard Hopkins when they were 'readers' of the Inner Temple, and he was chosen reader himself for vacations in 1665, 1666, and 1667. Contemporary records also show him serving on committees of the Inner Temple, and being sued in 1667–8 by John Gray of Ipswich for 'detaining' lands in Ely and Thetford.[41] On 24 November 1667 his son Richard was specially admitted to the Inner Temple at his father's request.[42] On 9 February 1668 his eldest son, Christopher, was called to the bar; but a month later, on 12 March, he was buried at Ipswich.[43] As if this were not blow enough to the grieving family, on 29 December 1669 another son, John, aged twenty-six, was buried in the same parish of St. Nicholas, Ipswich.[44]

Samuel Pepys does not mention *Paradise Lost*, but many entries in his diary during 1668 and 1669 help to explain the poem's appeal to Restoration readers. Take the entry for 30 April 1668. It was an unexpectedly cold day, and a busy one, for Mr. Pepys. He was worried about his eyesight, and the state of his purse, but these were not all: 'The kingdom in an ill state through poverty; a fleet going out, and no money to maintain it or set it out; seamen yet unpaid, and mutinous when pressed to go out again; our office able to do little, nobody trusting us, nor we desiring any to trust us . . . the business of religion do disquiet everybody, the Parliament being vehement against the nonconformists while the King seems to be willing to countenance them. So we are all poor, and in pieces—God help us! while the peace is like to go on between Spain and France; and then the French may be apprehended able to attack us. So God help us!'

Despite the swift success of *Paradise Lost*, no second edition of the book was published until 1674. With a successful investment on his hands, why did Simmons delay? The poem was now his property; the decision to reprint was presumably his, and not the author's, to make. Unfortunately, we can only guess at his reasons. He may have waited long for a promised revision. He may have been preoccupied with the publishing of Joseph Caryl's voluminous commentary on the Book of Job. He may have entertained the desirability of reprinting the epic with a companion piece on *Paradise Regained*, which the blind poet was now completing. If this last was indeed his motivation, he was to be disappointed, for when the sequel to *Paradise Lost* was ready, Milton took it to another publisher.

# 15. Last Days, 1669–1674

Although Milton had printed nothing in the six years between 1660 and 1667, during the final six years of his life he published one or more books every year. But this burst of activity was not, for the most part, the product of any new urge to composition. Two factors seem to have been responsible. First, half a dozen London booksellers were making the discovery that writings by John Milton had commercial value, and they persuaded the blind author to go through his papers with a view to their quite unsuspected needs. They were interested in the manuscripts of his Latin grammar, his little handbook of logic, his unfinished history of Britain, his short history of Russia, his official letters of state, his private letters, even his academic exercises done as a student at Cambridge. They were interested in a possible new edition of his minor poetry (that totally unsuccessful bid for recognition!), and Simmons, of course, was interested in a possible revision of the highly successful epic. Milton himself, aged sixty in 1669, evidently welcomed the inquiries of publishers as a means of setting his literary house in order.

They were busy years, those last six years of his life; and during them he was more than ever dependent upon the eyes of other men—for composition, for revision, for the making of fair copies, for proof-reading of eight or nine books. He greatly aggravated this problem by deciding, in 1669 or 1670, to get along without the help of his daughters.[1] For a number of years Mary and Deborah had read to him when he needed them (and could find them), pronouncing Latin and other foreign words which they understood little, if at all. Deborah had probably been the more serviceable of the two; we are told that she was much like her father, was sometimes his amanuensis, and grew into 'a woman of good sense and a genteel behaviour'.[2] Nevertheless, the tedium of acting as eyes and hands for a blind man was becoming more and more intolerable to both girls, and the outbursts of impatience grew. In the autumn of 1669 Anne was twenty-three, Mary was twenty-one, and Deborah was seventeen. It was time that they were trained to support themselves, as necessity might some day require; and so he sent them out to learn various kinds of handicraft. Anne, the eldest and the lame one, and probably Mary too, were taught the making of gold and silver lace. Deborah may have started to learn embroidery also; it was, as Edward Phillips remarks in telling the story, a sort of manufacture 'proper for women to learn'; but she soon became a companion to a lady named Merian, who evidently grew fond of her and, with the father's consent, eventually took her to Ireland to live.[3] All three daughters seem to have been resentful even of this final evidence of paternal concern for their welfare; they had thought themselves ill-treated by their stepmother, and they probably felt (like other daughters in other times) that their father, if he had not married again, could have provided for them more handsomely. It is possible that Deborah did not wait to be sent away, but left home; so, at least, her own daughter remembered the story when she was questioned in 1738, and Milton, long before pronouncing to his brother the bitter terms of his last will and testament, spoke sadly to Christopher of his daughters 'deserting him'. If Deborah was indeed the favourite daughter, as all the evidence indicates, defection by the last child of Mary Powell would have been a shock reviving a host of unpleasant memories.[4]

In any case, with his daughters gone, and with the near certitude that he would father no more children, Milton began to give thought, not only to putting his literary affairs in order, but also to settling his domestic affairs and making proper provision for the future of his beloved wife. Getting all three girls trained to a trade and decently accommodated in other homes was a considerable drain on his modest financial resources.[5] He resolved, therefore, on two drastic steps: he would sell most of his library while he was still alive to make certain that the books brought reasonable prices; and he would move into a smaller house, preferably one not far away, and one with a larger garden.[6] He had no future literary or scholarly plans that required a personal library—such an ironic luxury, anyway, for a blind man!—and a smaller house would be more convenient for Betty after he was gone. There is no evidence that Milton had a morbid fear or anticipation of death as early as 1669, but sixty was a good age to be thinking realistically about the future, as well as taking satisfaction in accomplishments of the past.

We have no details about the sale of the books; we do not know precisely when it happened, or where, or by whom, or (most tantalizing of all) to whom. We have only John Toland's statement, which there is no compelling reason to doubt, that 'towards the latter part of his time he contracted [i.e., reduced] his library, both because the heirs he left could not make a right use of it, and that he thought he might sell it more to their advantage than they could be able to do themselves'.[7] Repeating this story, Richardson suggests no connexion, though there may well be one, between it and his own unique account (from 'one that had often seen him') of Milton's lodging 'about 1670' ('three or four years before he died') in the house of Edward Millington, 'a seller of old books' and later a famous auctioneer.[8] Millington's shop was the Pelican in Duck Lane, Little

Britain—only a short walk from Jewin Street—and it seems quite likely that Milton turned to him for help in disposing of his library. Perhaps what really happened (though we may never know for certain) is that when the move to the smaller house was taking place, both Milton and his books went to Millington's house, the blind man to remain there until his thoughtful wife had their new residence in perfect order for him. Such may be the simple, pleasant reason that a contemporary could give us, through Richardson, an affecting picture of his chance meeting with the aged poet 'in the street', with Millington the antiquarian bookseller leading him gently 'by the hand'.

It was about 1669 or 1670, then, when the Miltons moved from Jewin Street to a smaller house in the Artillery Walk leading to Bunhill Fields. The Artillery Walk was a road, sometimes called simply 'Bunhill', with a row of houses on one side ('such as any substantial trader or merchant might dwell in', young Jacob Tonson later noticed), and the wall of the garden or exercising ground of the London Artillery Company on the other. Like the Jewin Street residence, the Bunhill house was in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate. It had a considerable garden in the rear, and four rooms with fireplaces, in addition to some other rooms not so equipped. Small but comfortable, with open ground to both north and east, it was apparently well suited to the modest needs of the blind man and his devoted wife. It was to be his last address.[9]

As people grow older, they become increasingly conscious of death, and during 1669 (to dwell a little longer with this year) Milton must have reflected with mixed emotions upon the news that occasionally reached him. Two poets of sorts, Henry King and Sir John Denham, died in 1669, as did Luke Robinson, the college friend who had later become his employer as a member of the Council of State. A former enemy, William Prynne, died in October, and an old classmate at both St. Paul's and Cambridge, Robert Pory, died in November.[10] We have already noticed the burial of John Milton, Christopher's son, on 29 December at Ipswich, where his grieving father was now a Justice of the Peace.[11] There were less grim events to reflect upon, of course. August or September saw the marriage of two people who were soon to become, if they were not already, his good friends: Thomas Bendish and Cromwell's grand-daughter, Bridget Ireton.[12] On 28 October his Quaker friend, Thomas Ellwood, married Mary Ellis. Moreover, during this year the seventeenth edition of Buchler's *Thesaurus* was published, with some interesting additions by Edward Phillips—among them one of the first chronological accounts of English poetry ever published, including a glowing tribute to *Paradise Lost*: 'John Milton, in addition to his other most elegant writings in English and Latin, has recently published *Paradise Lost*, a poem which, whether we consider the sublimity of the subject, or the combined pleasantness and majesty of the style, or the sublimity of the invention, or the beauty of its images and natural descriptions, will, if I mistake not, be accorded the name of truly heroic, since by the judgements of many who are qualified to pronounce, it is reputed to have reached the perfection of this kind of poetry.' Thus wrote the admiring nephew and former pupil, who in the same work also praised the inane versifying of John Lane.[13] Discriminating and disinterested public praise of the epic had yet to come. (In 1669 Samuel Pepys finished the last page of his diary, and so to bed without having ever thought to mention John Milton or his poetry.)

His domestic arrangements satisfactorily re-ordered with a view to the future, the blind author turned his attention to his many unpublished papers, literary and scholarly, completed or incomplete. Almost bathetic was his first dark step after the publication of *Paradise Lost*: he gave the printer of the epic, Samuel Simmons, the manuscript of a brief textbook which he had written long ago, doubtless for his own use in teaching. This was his simplified Latin grammar in English. Whether Simmons or the bookseller, John Starkey, undertook to serve as publisher is not clear, but the book, a duodecimo of only seventy pages, was ready by late June of 1669, when bound copies were offered for sale at eightpence. Perhaps because it was so cheap, so obviously another schoolbook, only about two dozen copies of the first edition of *Accidence Commenced Grammar* have survived, and these with two different title pages: one 'Printed by S. Simmons' indicates the writer as 'J. M.' (was Simmons still nervous about his notorious author?); the other, 'Printed for S. S. and are to be sold by John Starkey', gives Milton's name in full, and was so advertised in the Trinity term catalogue.[14]

Milton had dictated a brief introduction, repeating his old charge of inefficiency in educational methods of the day:

> It hath been long a general complaint, not without cause, in the bringing up of youth, and still is, that the tenth part of man's life, ordinarily extended, is taken up in learning, and that very scarcely, the Latin tongue. Which tardy proficience may be attributed to several causes: in particular, the making two labours of one, by learning first the Accidence, then the Grammar, in Latin, ere the language of those rules be understood. The only remedy of this was to join both books into one, and in the English tongue, whereby the long way is much abbreviated and the labour of understanding much more easy. [VI. 286]

These words remind us of the letter *Of Education* sent to Hartlib a quarter of a century before. (They doubtless reminded Milton too; a little later, he reprinted the letter.) On the other hand, he was now ready to admit defeat on another favourite idea: he included no instructions on the continental or Italian pronunciation, 'since few will be persuaded to pronounce Latin otherwise than their own English'. This concession, coming seven years after Thomas Ellwood's encounter with Milton's convictions on the subject, suggests that the teacher was feeling his sixty years.

He was still teaching occasionally—as some of his enemies noticed with scorn. In 1673 one pamphleteer sneered at 'blind M. who teaches school about Moorfields'; another referred to 'the blind schoolmaster', and the 'prodigious conjunction of a Latin Secretary and an English schoolmaster, the appearance of which none of our astrologers foretold nor no comet portended'.[15] He was, of course, no schoolmaster; he conducted no school, but continued to exchange friendly, informal instruction for the reading aloud and writing from dictation that boys, sent by some thoughtful parents, were prepared to do for him. Again, we know the names of only a few of these fortunate pupils. One was William Davenant, a younger son of the famous poet–dramatist, whom Milton helped in his understanding of Greek and Latin authors before his admission to Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1673. (Studious and gifted, he published a translation from the French at the age of twenty-one; three years later, while travelling abroad as a tutor, he drowned in the Seine.) Young Davenant may have been sent to Milton before his father's death in April 1668, but he was almost certainly a pupil in the period we have now reached (when, incidentally, he was an intimate friend of a youthful apprentice bookseller named Jacob Tonson).[16] Another student was Daniel Skinner, son and heir of a prosperous London merchant of the same name and possibly a relative of Milton's friend and former student, Cyriack Skinner. Daniel, born about 1651, was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, on 1 July 1670, and probably Milton helped to prepare him for his rather tardy entrance into the University. He did well there; after graduating B.A., he was appointed a junior Fellow of his College on 2 October 1674.[17] A third pupil of this period, about whom we know very little, was possibly one Shadrach Cooke, who was admitted to Christ's College on 13 December 1670 at the age of fifteen.[18]

Daniel Skinner made himself especially useful to his teacher. His handwriting was unusually legible, even beautiful (as Milton must have learned from others); intelligent and scholarly besides, he was an almost ideal amanuensis; and so the blind author intent upon getting his papers in shape for publication had Skinner make clear transcripts of some that had originally been written by various hands, and now needed editing and perhaps final revision. We do not know when this process started, or how many different works Skinner prepared for the press, but it seems likely that he began before 1670 and continued, during vacation periods, up to the very time of Milton's death. We know for certain that he transcribed all the Latin letters of state which the former secretary had translated and preserved, and that he transcribed the first 196 pages of the Latin treatise on Christian doctrine (making corrections and revisions on the remaining pages, doubtless preparatory to transcribing them as well). Probably he did much more of which we have no present knowledge. He was highly motivated to this task; as he declared later, he had 'a great desire and ambition of some of his learning'—'ambition of good literature made me covet his acquaintance'.[19]

It is to anticipate, but I may as well complete here the unhappy story of Daniel Skinner. Milton evidently came to trust him completely; when, as we shall see, an attempt to publish in London the Latin letters of state was frustrated by the authorities, Skinner was given or retained the transcript he had made. Indeed, Milton bequeathed to him not only the manuscript of these letters but also the unpublished *De Doctrina Christiana* and, it would seem, the Commonplace Book he had used for notetaking since his days at Horton. There was probably an understanding between them that Skinner would get the first two works printed abroad (Daniel Elzevir of Amsterdam may have expressed interest), making what he could out of them for his pains. Within a year after Milton's death, negotiations with Elzevir had been completed, but, unwarned by the experience with the letters, Skinner talked about his plan—to Samuel Pepys, the influential 'friend' of his sister Mary, and, incredibly, to Sir Joseph Williamson, the Secretary of State. The naïve young man soon learned that his ambitions for political advancement—most immediately an appointment in the English embassy at Nimeguen, East Holland—were going to be permanently blocked so long as he was involved in the publication of anything by Milton, or, for that matter, if the two works got into print. At first he withdrew personally from the arrangements, leaving the manuscripts with Elzevir. That was not enough to satisfy Sir Joseph, though it probably more than satisfied Elzevir. Skinner's father finally wrote to the Dutch printer (2 February 1677), who obediently sent him the two manuscripts. The elder Skinner then turned them over to Sir Joseph, who had them put into a cupboard in the State Paper Office in Whitehall—where they disappeared for 146 years.[20] Skinner, who had been threatened with expulsion from Trinity College early in 1677, graduated M.A. later that year, and was appointed a major Fellow in 1679; then he, too, perhaps mercifully, disappeared from our knowledge. He even rid himself of the harmless Commonplace Book of Milton, giving or selling it to Sir Richard Graham, Viscount Preston, who was so little impressed by the relic that he used it for his own notetaking.[21]

Who will now pass judgement on this 'very pretty young man'? Skinner went to Milton in the first place, not because he approved of his politics or his religion, but because he aspired to become learned. What did he learn? A trusting old man made him his literary executor, and he failed in this trust when it threatened his personal advancement. It was doubtless Edward Phillips, also hoping to profit from a blind man's confidence, who precipitated the crisis by obtaining from Milton (or his widow) the original drafts of the Latin letters of state which Skinner had copied, and then selling them to a London bookseller, who had them printed abroad before Elzevir could act. Without naming Phillips ('a poor fellow that had formerly surreptitiously got them from Milton'), Skinner got excited by this unexpected interference with his plans, and he talked. (Elzevir, unexcited, eloquently professing abhorrence of Milton's politics, quietly and anonymously pirated the Phillips text, and then lost interest in the superior Skinner transcript still in his hands.) As a result of all this, Milton's treatise on theology seemed comparatively unimportant to everyone concerned. On the other hand, had the treatise been printed in 1676, as was designed, *Paradise Lost* would probably not have been read for 150 years and more as the greatest religious poem in English. Milton (who knows?) might instead have been remembered as a minor poet of most heretical opinions who tried to write a Christian epic. Let Daniel Skinner rest in peace, under the double cross that must mark his forgotten grave.[22]

Resuming our chronological account of Milton, we may notice that the year 1670 (when his future biographer, John Toland, was born, and when John Dryden was appointed poet laureate) saw the deaths of a considerable number of people who have figured in his life story. In January, George Monk and Viscount Ranelagh died, and Milton's former pupil, Richard Jones, became the third Viscount. In April, though the news may never have reached him, the lovely Italian singer, Leonora, whom he had celebrated in several Latin epigrams so long ago, also passed away. In June it was Milton's sister-in-law by his second wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Lynde, whose husband Edmund had predeceased her by only a month or two. They left four children, including a new-born baby, to be cared for by relatives[23] Later in the year the famous Comenius died, and, as we shall see in a moment, Milton lost a publisher who was probably also an old acquaintance. In September an enemy, Alexander Morus, died at Charenton, near Paris, having seen his *Poemata* published during the previous year. It included verses addressed, not only to Salmasius, but also to several people whom Milton had once accounted his friends: Holstenius, Carlo Dati, and Giovanni Diodati.[24]

Before the year came to a close, another book of poems appeared that no real friend of Milton wanted to bring to his attention. The writer was Peter Du Moulin, and in his book he acknowledged openly, and proudly, his authorship of the anonymous *Regii Sanguinis Clamor* of 1652 that Milton had so stubbornly, in two different works, tried to attribute to Morus. Du Moulin even reprinted the scurrilous poem, 'In Impurissimum Nebulonem Joannem Miltonum', and gloated over the way that Milton's unwillingness to admit error had narrowly saved him from detection and punishment. The blind man, he declared, 'preferred to have me safe rather than himself ridiculous'. It would be interesting to know whether anyone ever told Milton about this book, or read to him any of its humiliating pages.[25]

It was almost certainly in March of 1670 that 'an eminent member' of the House of Lords visited Milton in the hope of receiving help on a matter of national importance. The Portuguese Queen of Charles II was still childless, and fearing that no legitimate heir to the crown would ever be born of this unhappy marriage, some of the royal councillors had decided that Charles should ask Parliament for a special Bill of divorce rather than let the succession go to his brother, the Duke of York, suspected of being a Roman Catholic. While this extreme remedy was still being discussed, John Manners, Lord Roos, eldest son of the Earl of Rutland, did ask Parliament to allow him to divorce his wife, Anne Pierpont, daughter of the Marquis of Dorchester. The Bill was introduced into the Lords by Buckingham on 5 March, and a bitter debate ensued, the measure being opposed by the Duke of York and his adherents, the two archbishops and nearly all the bishops, as vigorously as it was pushed by Ashley, Trevor, Lauderdale, the Earl of Orrery, and others. There was no overlooking the implications of 'Lord Roos's business', even before the King manifested his personal concern by visiting the House of Lords on several occasions. We do not know which of the Lords remembered that Milton was a scholarly authority on the legal and theological aspects of divorce, and therefore 'consulted' him; nor do we know what Milton told him about precedents and justifications. It is hard to believe that he would have had much sympathy for those whose wealth and power permitted them to seek divorce in such a fashion; but if his visitor was Lady Ranelagh's brother or the Earl of Anglesey or some other friend, the blind man may have tried to help. In any case, the Act finally passed a third reading in the Lords on 28 March, and then a third reading in the Commons on 31 March, becoming law when the King gave his assent and the Parliament adjourned on 11 April. Eventually the King abandoned any notion of a subsequent royal divorce Bill. For one moment, however, Milton again found himself involved in an action which might have changed the whole course of English history.[26]

His own *History of Britain* was published in 1670. The decision to carry the narrative no further than the Norman Conquest was probably made long before, and involved no disappointment now, especially if he had by this time disposed of his working library. He had wearied of the undertaking. The publisher of the *History* was not Samuel Simmons or John Starkey, but James Allestry, once an apprentice of his old friend George Thomason, now an established and enterprising bookseller at Thomason's familiar address in St. Paul's Churchyard.[27] Allestry probably came to him, seeking vendible manuscripts, and Milton may have promised him his textbook on the art of logic as well. The publisher planned to bring out the *History* in a handsome quarto edition complete with a portrait of its famous author. There is no extant record of the book being licensed or registered, but Edward Phillips tells us that a licenser (Thomas Tomkyns again?) objected to 'some passages' as 'too sharp against the clergy', and that they had to be deleted.[28] Doubtless annoyed by this interference, Milton gave the expunged pages to his friend the Earl of Anglesey, who had expressed sympathy, and who may have undertaken to see that the words eventually appeared in print. (Anglesey's visit could have been in March, during the Lord Roos affair, or a little later.) Though the proofreading of 308 pages must have been a particularly arduous task for a blind man to supervise, the *History* was finally published.[29] Not much later, on 3 November 1670, James Allestry died.

Meanwhile, for at least the third time in his life, Milton had sat for a portrait. The artist chosen by Allestry had been William Faithorne, considered one of the best engravers of the day. We do not know whether Faithorne came to Milton's home in Bunhill to make the coloured crayon drawing from which the copper plate was to be cut, or whether the blind author was led a few times (by Millington?) to the engraver's studio on the north side of the Strand just outside Temple Bar. In any case, it is a fair guess that Betty Milton cast a woman's careful eye over her husband's costume before the artist set to work, and we may sense her influence in the change of the soft collar in the crayon drawing to a square-cut falling band in the final engraving. She later told Aubrey, 'The pictures before his books are not *at all* like him'; she preferred the portrait he had given her, that of the rosy-cheeked, handsome student of Cambridge. They did not purchase Faithorne's original drawing. When, however, many decades later, Milton's daughter Deborah saw it for the first time, she exclaimed, ' 'Tis my father! 'Tis my dear father!' It has a softer, more serene or impassive expression than the engraving made from it, which, emphasizing the lean face and the lines around the mouth, makes the poet look stern and forbidding. One may agree with Betty Milton and regret that the engraving is today the most familiar of all Milton's portraits.[30]

The published portrait is, according to its inscription, of Milton at the age of sixty-two, the age he reached on 9 December of that year. This fact argues that the *History* may initially have been scheduled for publication in 1671, rather than 1670. On the other hand, actually published in 1671 was a second work which clearly had been scheduled for publication in 1670. A volume containing *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, to be published by John Starkey, was licensed by Thomas Tomkyns on 2 July 1670, officially registered on 10 September, advertised for sale in the Michaelmas term catalogue of that year, but not in fact published until some time in 1671, according to its imprint.[31] We do not know what caused the delay, but we may notice that this book (of 220 pages) had the same printer, John Macock, as did the *History*.[32] Possibly Milton had some afterthoughts about his manuscript of either *Paradise Regained* or *Samson Agonistes*, and insisted on last-minute revision which in turn was delayed by Allestry's decision to push ahead with the *History*. Another possibility is that Simmons, learning of Starkey's intention of publishing a work entitled *Paradise Regained*, informed him, and reminded Milton, that the poet had signed a legal contract agreeing not to print 'any other book or manuscript of the same tenor or subject' as *Paradise Lost* 'without the consent of the said Samuel Simmons'.

We may never know what happened, but Simmons's failure to bring out a second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1670 or soon thereafter is very puzzling. It was to his advantage, as much as Milton's, to do so. Let us recall that Simmons and Starkey were associated in the publication of Milton's *Grammar* in 1669. Another possible clue is a faithful reproduction by one William Dolle of the 1670 Faithorne engraving; it is dated 1671 (and Milton's age changed to sixty-three), but it fits perfectly the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost* in which it often appears. It does not fit the 1672 *Artis Logicæ* in which it first appeared.[33] Was it specially designed in 1671 for a new edition of the epic which, for some reason, Simmons then decided to postpone? Did Milton himself hold up the second edition by proposing considerable revisions which he never got around to making? It is a nice little literary mystery. I shall add to its complexity later with another story.

I must pause now, however, to ponder some other problems offered by Milton's attempt to provide a sequel or companion poem to his epic, and I must describe this attempt briefly. He was justly proud of *Paradise Regained*. As Edward Phillips said later: 'Possibly the subject may not afford such variety of invention [as *Paradise Lost*], but it is thought by the most judicious to be little or nothing inferior to the other for style and decorum.' Phillips pointed this out because *Paradise Regained* was 'generally censured to be much inferior to the other', and Milton 'could not hear with patience any such thing, when related to him'.[34] Did his annoyance spring from natural pride in a latest achievement, or from a feeling that the theme of his sequel was being undervalued? There is an anecdote, probably apocryphal but significant nevertheless, that Milton, told of the general attitude toward the two poems, commented: 'People have a general sense of the loss of Paradise, but not an equal gust for the regaining of it.'[35] He believed this, whether or not he ever really said it.

In its own way, *Paradise Regained* is as bold an undertaking as *Paradise Lost*, and was begun, we may be sure, only after Milton had achieved a full, coherent formulation of his ethical beliefs, complementary to the theological formulation in the first part of his *De Doctrina Christiana* on which *Paradise Lost* was solidly based. He proposed to himself nothing less than a series of long speeches to be put into the mouth of Christ (nineteen, totalling 580 lines, they were eventually), and an elaboration of the temptation of Christ as briefly told by Luke (whose order he preferred for artistic reasons) that would involve the sheer invention of a number of appropriate temptations lacking Scriptural warrant. The risk of sacrilege or blasphemy was great, the more so because Satan must be portrayed as a worthy antagonist, with humanly appealing arguments, lest Christ's triumph seem trivial. The encounter had to symbolize the victory of weakness over strength, of truth over craftiness and violence, of spirit over flesh; and yet Christ had to be depicted as a believable man among men—an embodiment of truly heroic virtue in human terms. This was no simple poetic task, and Milton approached it by praying for divine inspiration.

Thomas Ellwood almost certainly inspired the title, and probably the opening lines of Book I and lines 606–17 in Book IV. But we do not know when much, or most, of *Paradise Regained* was composed.[36] Not knowing Ellwood's story but familiar with the poem's opening, Phillips said that it 'doubtless was begun and finished and printed after the other [*Paradise Lost*] was published [in 1666, he mistakenly thought], and that in a wonderful short space considering the sublimeness of it'. But this is pure guesswork, not evidence. My own guess is that the 508 lines which introduce speakers or describe the setting or theme were dictated between 1665 and July 1670. The remaining 1,562 lines are entirely dialogue or soliloquy, and they may have been composed earlier; they may represent an unfinished drama on 'Christ's Victory and Triumph' (see I. 173 and recall Giles Fletcher's poem) or 'The Temptation of Christ', with no explicit reference to the 'finding' or regaining of Paradise. For Milton to have attempted a poem on the temptation of Christ—along with poems on the temptations of Adam and of Samson—hardly needed any prompting from Ellwood, though the young Quaker may well have given him the idea of salvaging an earlier project and linking it to the theme implied by the title of *Paradise Lost*. It was at Chalfont St. Giles that Ellwood had offered his naïve criticism of the epic, 'Thou hast said much here of paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of paradise found?' Milton, it will be recalled, did not answer this insensitive question, 'but sat some time in a muse', and then abruptly changed the subject. Later (how much later is uncertain) Milton showed Ellwood a copy of *Paradise Regained* (whether printed or not is uncertain) and 'in a pleasant tone' said to him, 'This is owing to you, for you put it into my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont, which before I had not thought of.'[37] The irony here is not muted by Ellwood's self-congratulatory tone. He had given the blind poet an idea, but not the idea he thought. One of the major points of *Paradise Lost* had been the 'finding' of a paradise—within. The ways of doing this could be elaborated in another poem, one which fully illustrated the symbolic regaining of Paradise by the perfect Man—one which concentrated on a theme which, theologically, was omnipresent in the epic (from its fifth line onward), if somehow lost on one literary critic.

There is a temptation to regard *Paradise Regained* as the fulfilment of an early design to write a 'brief epic', since Milton in 1642 had mentioned the Book of Job as an example of this form and Job is frequently mentioned in *Paradise Regained*. However, by Milton's pupil, Edward

Phillips, and by many other contemporaries the Book of Job was considered to be a drama, and Milton may have eventually accepted this view, passing it on to his students. In any case, *Samson Agonistes* more closely resembles Job in both structure and tone than does *Paradise Regained*, and the latter poem has many affinities with the Dialogues of Plato, which Milton may also have considered a literary form worthy of imitation. There is, however, no obvious model for *Paradise Regained*, and, despite his practice in his other two major poems, Milton provides no preface or argument. *Paradise Regained* is supposed to explain and justify itself.

This fact has almost been its ruin. For example, though many readers have persisted in doing so, finding Milton himself in his characterization of Christ will not help anyone to understand the poem better, and doubtless causes one to appreciate it much less. Even a cautious effort to distinguish between resemblance and identity is not only distracting, and ultimately impossible; it is irrelevant. We must assume that the poet essayed an objective portrait, and judge the results. We must not assume that self-idealization either crept in or was a compelling motive. On the other hand, since Milton was attempting to portray a 'perfect Man', it is fair to find in the poem his personal notions of perfect behaviour, and also of the temptations that make even superior men fall short of such behaviour. This exercise will not improve critical appreciation either, but it is at least legitimate, and for those interested in the poet as well as the poem, it can throw some light on biography, as seeking a presumed self-portrait cannot.

It is instructive to make a list, perhaps beginning with the Seven Deadly Sins, of the temptations that Milton omits. Let us, however, notice only one: the second Adam is never tempted as was the first; he is not deeply in love and asked to recognize a hierarchy of love. Such is not the temptation leeringly suggested by Belial and loftily rejected by Satan; Belial mentioned 'women', not woman, and Satan scornfully talked about 'beauty'; neither of them, poor devils, even thought of a loving and beloved wife. But Milton had made this the universally appealing pivotal point of his epic, and he had described the results of a less ideal marriage in *Samson Agonistes*. There is no reason to believe that he changed his point of view about the importance of these human tragedies when he allowed Satan, in *Paradise Regained*, to ascribe a severe asceticism to his scarcely known adversary. It is not that Satan was a notorious liar; it is rather that Milton was an artist bent on observing 'decorum', and quick to recognize any limitations of his subject-matter. Marriage was not for Christ, and since Adam's and Samson's temptations could not be applied to the perfect Man, the problem became one of choosing some that could.

The first temptation, then, was the one mentioned first by Luke, as interpreted by Protestant theologians: distrust in God's providence.

Distrust, Milton could readily agree (as one who thought it important to justify God's providence), even the most devout must occasionally wrestle with. Basic to other temptations, this one belonged in a class by itself, and so Milton treated it, letting it fill the first day. He treated it also as a matter extremely profound and disarmingly simple: a matter of providing one's self (and others) with food when hungry, but, for the more-than-perfect Man, by revealing his divine nature in the process. Since it is only fair to say that Milton was never tempted to perform a miracle, we must not overemphasize his interest in the temptation to distrust. He presented it briefly.

The temptation of the kingdoms, however, gave him an opportunity to present, and discuss in detail, a variety of worldly attractions which a man with a spiritual mission must either reject altogether or view in proper perspective. The Christian tradition, with its extensive exegesis of the temptation scene, provided Milton with a number of possible topics, and to those he selected he boldly added others which seemed to him relevant. Indeed, he so elaborated this episode in the simple story in Luke that it became, not a second temptation, but a series of seven distinct offers or suggestions by Satan, probably in what Milton regarded as an ascending order of attractiveness to any great and good man. The decision to do this made impossible a three-part poem reflecting the structure of the Scriptural source, and so Milton invented his own structure, with transitional scenes between the first and second, and later the second and third, Biblical episodes, which were meanwhile kept in the reader's memory by restricting the narrative to three days of dialogue.

The first worldly attraction, then—one which looked both backward and forward—was alluring food: a temptation to intemperance. The second, also conceived as an offer of Satan, was wealth, thought of as a means of gaining power. The next two were suggestions—proposed motives that were not intrinsically evil, but could quickly become evil without spiritual perspective: the good man is tempted to accept worldly glory as a motive for achieving noble ends, and, perhaps even more, he is tempted by zeal and a sense of duty to act too precipitately. He must learn, therefore, to distinguish between true and false glory, and to recognize that

> who best
> Can suffer, best can do; best reign, who first
> Well hath obeyed . . . [III. 194–6]

Keeping balance, Milton followed these two diabolical suggestions with two additional offers that return us to his simple source material: the good man is tempted to achieve his ends by the use of crude military force (symbolized by Parthia) or by the use of majestic secular power in all its forms (symbolized by Rome). Another, greater temptation (in Milton's view) remained, but it was nothing in Satan's ability to give, and so first Milton respected his Biblical original by having Satan declare the hitherto unstated condition of all his actual offers: 'if Thou wilt fall down / And worship me as Thy superior lord.' Luxury and power, these were gifts of the devil. (Glory and zeal, these were motives with a potential of evil in them.)

Satan's condition scornfully rejected, the poem introduces its climactic suggestion, prepared for artistically by the mention of Parthia and Rome, and now given the two longest speeches of all. The seventh worldly temptation (compare the Seven Deadly Sins) is that the man with a spiritual mission prepare himself for it by using purely secular literature and learning (symbolized by Athens). Milton's Christ, *who already possesses this knowledge*, points out that it is superfluous, and even potentially misleading, for anyone seeking religious truth. This, of course, was the position Milton had taken in the composition of his own *De Doctrina Christiana*, and in his comments on the preparation of ministers in his two pamphlets of 1659. He causes his Christ to make the distinction vigorously.

But as Christ's opening remarks ('Think not but that I know these things') more than suggest, a paradox is involved in this rejection, and the paradox has troubled generations of readers of Milton's poem, who do not trouble to equate this suggestion with the earlier suggestions of glory and zeal. Has the Puritan conquered the Humanist at last? Is Milton, master of so much classical learning, now disillusioned? Or is he, instead, masochistic? Is a blind scholar pathetically struggling to rationalize his painful limitations? However one answers such questions, one should do so with full recognition of the fact that *Paradise Regained* presents no new convictions of its author. Only its tone and emphases are new. Moreover, just as Milton is quite candidly classical in his discussion of Christian virtues in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (which abjures non-Scriptural literature), so his *Paradise Regained* is saturated with Platonism, exhibiting much more of a debt to Spenser than to, let us say, Giles Fletcher. His symbols of evil echo Malory; the heroic virtue of his Christ reflects Aristotle's magnanimous man. Indeed, the two speeches so often taken as an absolute rejection of classical culture are the finest poetic fruits of that culture to be found anywhere in English literature. The paradox can be resolved only by closer attention to what Milton is saying. He is saying that even the very best of secular art and learning are not an essential preparation for Christian ministry, since

> he who receives
> Light from above, from the fountain of light,
> No other doctrine needs . . . [IV. 288–90]

He says this because he had long believed it. If he says it more radically here than elsewhere, and gives his conviction more prominence (there was nothing in the Christian tradition to suggest the introduction of this climactic temptation), it is because, electing to discuss the greatest of temptations facing the man with a religious mission, he feels this one most keenly of all. The final paradox, unresolvable, may be that he yielded to it in *Paradise Regained*, while having his perfect Man reject it.

Physical force had been one of Satan's offers, and remains in his power to use. It is always the last resort of evil baffled by truth, and in the poem is prepared for by a second transitional temptation—the temptation to fear. Christ's humanity is superior to this final suggestion, and so it is time to recognize again (as in the first episode) his dual nature. Employing force, Satan tests the divinity of his opponent, and falls in amazement as the Son of God stands on the highest pinnacle of the temple. This is the denouement but not the point of the poem. The point is that human perfection having been revealed as possible, 'A fairer Paradise is founded now / For Adam and his chosen sons', and the God-man can enter on His glorious work 'and begin to save mankind'.

The poem's theme is, of course, ethical rather than mystical. It presents perfect behaviour with the reasons for it verbalized. Milton believed in the Atonement; it was basic to his justification of the ways of God to men; but he chose here to emphasize Christ the Exemplar and Teacher—the ways that men must follow if they would justify a renewal of God's favour. Milton's critics have occasionally censured him for a temperamental lack of interest in the Crucifixion, but this is to ignore the problem posed by any thematic sequel to *Paradise Lost*. Not Christ's sacrifice, but rather His successful resistance to Satan provides the appropriate symbol of humanity's potential ability, through moral obedience, to regain what mankind lost by Adam's disobedience. Milton's Christ is mysteriously the God-man at both beginning and end, but in the middle of the poem He is man, acting perfectly as Milton conceived perfection. As man, He is not the only exemplar mentioned: Job is also on Milton's mind, as is Socrates. It has not been sufficiently noticed that the poem nowhere insists or recommends that we imitate Christ, nowhere presents Him explicitly as an example. Milton is writing more of a Platonic dialogue than a Protestant sermon. Christ makes no decision without a full explanation of His reasons for doing so. He is 'Right Reason' personified. We should behave wisely, therefore, not because someone has thus behaved, but rather because we have learned spiritual wisdom and elect to behave thus. But spiritual wisdom, Milton insists—it is the ultimate paradox—is learned without the aid of secular literature, which may, indeed, prove distracting.

To get back to our chronological account, we may notice a few other events of 1671 besides the publication of *Paradise Regained*. A third edition of Edward Phillips's *New World of English Words* also appeared.[38]

John Knowesley, who had been a Fellow of Christ's College when Milton entered as a student there, died in May. Earlier in the year, Thomas Hussey of Bread Street died, and in November it was the once-great Thomas Fairfax, to whom Milton had addressed a sonnet so long ago. A friend, William Joyner, about whom we know all too little, published a drama entitled *The Roman Empress*.[39] The year's most sensational literary event, however, was the production, on 7 December, of the Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. These plays, and such others as Aphra Behn's *The Forced Marriage*, Dryden's *An Evening's Love*, and Thomas Shadwell's *The Humorists* were the current competition which Milton challenged by publishing his *Samson Agonistes*, deliberately based on ancient models 'much different from what among us passes for best'. He was defensive, but not at all apologetic, in the preface to his *Samson*. An iconoclast with a difference, he was offering the public perhaps the greatest novelty of all—a true re-creation, in English, of Greek tragedy.

After James Allestry's death in November 1670 he had been succeeded as publisher of Milton's *History of Britain* by Spencer Hickman, who therefore had a new title page printed in 1671. For some reason, however, he assigned his rights in the book to another stationer on or before 24 August 1671. Nevertheless, probably because of a previous contract with Allestry, Milton gave Hickman the manuscript of a second textbook he had written long before, his *Artis Logicæ*, and Hickman published it in 1672, before 13 May.[40] This meant another arduous job of proof-reading to supervise; Milton was bringing out his final books at the rate of only one a year. The title page of the *Artis Logicæ* announces it to be the work of 'Joannis Miltoni Angli' (reminiscent of the earlier Latin Defences); he evidently saw no incongruity in alternating undistinguished schoolbooks with volumes of highly distinctive verse; but the ironic contrast was not lost on others. Someone about this time wrote the following lines on a blank leaf of his copy of *Eikonoklastes*:

> That thou escap'st that vengeance which o'ertook,
> Milton, thy regicides, and thy own book,
> Was clemency in Charles beyond compare.
> And yet thy doom doth prove more grievous far:
> Old, sickly, poor, stark blind, thou writ'st for bread;
> So for to live thou'dst call Salmasius from the dead.[41]

It must have seemed to his enemies, and even to some of his friends, that he was now writing 'for bread', but the truth, more likely, is that he was in orderly fashion publishing to the world the labours of a lifetime. The number of different printers and booksellers he involved in this process is striking. Early in 1673 Hickman had Robert Boulton helping in the sale of the *Artis Logicæ*, and a new title page was provided for him. Milton may even have suggested this move; Boulton had been one of the stationers who had helped Simmons in the early sale of *Paradise Lost*. We have three other booksellers still to meet.

Milton evidently thought of his *Artis Logicæ* as a work that might find readers on the Continent as well as in England, and perhaps it did. There was at least one man on the Continent in 1672 who was wondering what ever had happened to the wit who once wrote so brilliantly against Morus: Elie Bouhereau, in Pau, happening upon a copy of the 1654 *Defensio Secunda*, was captivated by it, and asked a friend, Marquis Turon de Beyrie, to inquire if Milton had survived the restoration of King Charles. The marquis, he learned, shared his high opinion of the Englishman's style. In a second letter Bouhereau said: 'I find him so brilliant and so agreeable everywhere that I should prefer to read entire volumes of his rather than a single page by his adversary, who seemed to me everywhere very pedantic and not at all witty.'[42] If Bouhereau happened subsequently upon a copy of the *Artis Logicæ*, he may have modified this praise somewhat. In any case, his judgement of Milton's style was not universally shared; Francis Vavassor, in his *De Epigrammate Liber* (1672), found it 'amazing and funny that in the very passage and very words in which Milton attributes solecisms to Salmasius, he himself commits no less solecism, or disgrace by solecism—offering himself, indeed, to be flogged when he speaks'.[43]

There is not much else to say of Milton in the year 1672; we know almost nothing of his activities apart from the publication of *Artis Logicæ*. It is possible that he spent some time on revision of his *History of Britain*,[44] and he may have been informed that his *History* was referred to several times in Thomas Blount's *Animadversions upon Sir Richard Baker's Chronicle and Its Continuation*.[45] He probably did not hear of the death, in Italy, of Antonio Malatesta, whom he had met so long ago. It was perhaps in 1672 that his daughter, Deborah, left for Ireland with the lady whom she was serving as a companion. On 22 July a nephew, Thomas Milton, Christopher's son, married Martha Fleetwood at St. Mary le Bone.[46] Another nephew, John Phillips, published a satire on Puritanism entitled *Maronides or Virgil Travestie: Being a New Paraphrase upon the Fifth Book of Virgil's Æneids*.[47] Politically, 1672 was an eventful year; on 18 March both England and France declared war on the Dutch; but the blind poet made no comment. (He could not have realized it, but the most important happening of the year, for him, was the birth of a future commentator on *Paradise Lost* named Joseph Addison.)

In the spring of 1673, however, seizing an unusual opportunity, Milton made a final public plea for freedom of speech and for religious toleration. Prompted by the peculiar complexity of the political situation of the moment, he ventured to reappear, for the last time, in his old role of pamphleteer. He was extremely cautious about it, mentioning no one by name, saying nothing about the Court or the Church of England that could be considered offensive, and omitting all talk of tithes or hirelings or church organization. What he had to say was simple and brief, and he put in as clearly and as directly as he could, writing in English rather than in Latin. Ostensibly addressing himself to any plain Protestant who would listen, he was actually doing again what he had hopefully done thirty long years before—writing for the benefit of a Parliament whose recent mood and actions had encouraged nonconformists to hope for better days.

Milton did not know, nor did the Parliament, that King Charles had bound himself by a secret treaty with Louis XIV of France to suppress Protestantism in England by the use of French money and French soldiers. Nevertheless, the Parliament that met on 4 February 1673 was fearful and suspicious; divided on many issues, it was united in its dread of Popery and of France. The Duke of York, heir to the English throne and commander of the fleets, was known as a Romanist, as was also Lord Treasurer Clifford of the King's Council. Papists were more and more active at court. Unhappily bound by an open treaty with Catholic France to destroy the Protestant state of Holland, England had a standing army officered by men of dubious Protestantism. The mood of distrust engendered by these circumstances suddenly crystallized on 15 March, when Charles II for the second time asserted his alleged royal prerogative in a Declaration of Indulgence which suspended the penal statutes against dissenters and recusants, and granted freedom of worship in meeting-houses licensed for the purpose. In a more trusting time such a gesture of royal tolerance would have been cheered by all nonconformists; but the irregularity of the act and a deep suspicion of the King's motive caused both nonconformists and Anglicans, who feared Catholicism more than they feared each other, to combine in denouncing indiscriminate toleration. 'No Popery' became the popular cry.

The Parliament acted with swift decision. In a short session (ending on 29 March) the legislators passed resolutions against the encroachment of Popery, succeeded in getting the Declaration of Indulgence cancelled and apologized for, and passed a Test Act which denied civil or military office under the Crown to anyone who would not take the sacrament by the rites of the Church of England. This last move, while it unmasked the religion of Clifford and the Duke of York, disabled the nonconformists too; and to reward their patriotic Protestantism in the hour of crisis, the Commons gratefully passed a Bill for the 'Ease of Protestant Dissenters'. However, at the close of the session the Lords were still delaying action on this intended substitute for the Declaration of Indulgence.[48]

Men of goodwill like Milton, watching these dramatic developments, were greatly heartened. They remembered that in 1670 the principles of religious tolerance had been eloquently debated in both Houses of the Cavalier Parliament, and now, three years later, the growing spirit of moderation had almost borne glorious fruit. Hereafter it was chiefly a matter of time. When the Parliament met again, in October, the Bill or one similar to it might pass both Houses. There was widespread sympathy for the nonconformists who had subordinated their own interests for the sake of Protestantism in England. Milton therefore thought the time auspicious for an attack on Popery in England and a terse argument for toleration among all English Protestants. Having held his peace for a dozen years, whatever his interest in current affairs had been, he suddenly realized that some of his deepest convictions were once more, providentially, popular sentiments; and he could not resist speaking up for freedom as it was implied in the 'No Popery' *furor*. By putting the basic issues in the simplest possible terms, he might succeed in persuading his countrymen to recognize the full logic of their ideas.

He proposed, first, to establish a sound basis for tolerance by an examination of the essential nature *Of True Religion*, heresy, and schism; and, second, to advocate four vital protections against the growth of Popery in England. Confident that 'this long and hot contest, whether Protestants ought to tolerate one another', can quickly be ended 'if men will be but rational and not partial' (171), he began by defining the points on which rational application was necessary. All Protestant churches, and particularly the Church of England,

> maintain these two points as the main principles of true religion: that the rule of true religion is the Word of God only, and that their faith ought not to be an implicit faith, that is, to believe (though as the Church believes) against or without express authority of Scripture. And if all Protestants, as universally as they hold these two principles, so attentively and religiously would observe them, they would avoid and cut off many debates and contentions, schisms and persecutions, which too oft have been among them, and more firmly unite against the common adversary. For hence it directly follows that no true Protestant can persecute or not tolerate his fellow Protestant, though dissenting from him in some opinions . . . [166]

Heretics cannot be tolerated because heresy 'is a religion taken up and believed from the traditions of men and additions to the Word of God' (167), and God has given man 'strictest command to reject all other traditions or additions whatsoever' (166). Sects arise 'when men follow the doctrine too much for the teacher's sake, whom they think almost infallible, and this becomes, through infirmity, implicit faith' (167). Sects may therefore arise in either a true church or a false one, as may schism, which is 'a rent or division in the Church, when it comes to the separating of congregations'. In the true Church, schism 'needs not tend to the breaking of communion if they can agree in the right administration of that wherein they communicate, keeping their other opinions to themselves, not being destructive to faith' (168).

Thus the definitions. If one accepts them, Milton argued, it follows plainly that Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians, Socinians, and

Arminians 'may have some errors, but are no heretics. Heresy is in the will and choice professedly against Scripture; error is against the will, in misunderstanding [Scripture] . . . It is a human frailty to err, and no man is infallible here on earth. But so long as all these profess to set the Word of God only before them as the rule of faith and obedience, and use all diligence and sincerity of heart . . . to understand the rule and obey it, they have done what man can do' (168). True, God promised by His Spirit to teach all things necessary to salvation; but 'the hottest disputes among Protestants, calmly and charitably inquired into, will be found less than such' (168–9). As examples Milton cited the Lutheran belief in consubstantiation ('an error indeed, but not mortal'), the Calvinist's belief in predestination (perhaps over-zealously asserting God's absolute power, 'not without plea of Scripture'), the Anabaptist's view of infant baptism and the Arian and Socinian view of the Trinity (both based on the silences of Scripture), and finally the charge that the Arminian sets up free will against free grace (an imputation the Arminian disclaims, grounding himself 'largely upon Scripture only'). 'It cannot be denied that the authors or late revivers of all these sects or opinions were learned, worthy, zealous, and religious men, as appears by their lives written, and the same of their many eminent and learned followers, perfect and powerful in the Scriptures, holy and unblameable in their lives; and it cannot be imagined that God would desert such painful and zealous labourers in His Church, and oft times great sufferers for their conscience, to damnable errors and a reprobate sense, who had so often implored the assistance of His Spirit' (169–70). What Protestant, then, 'unless he mean to abjure the principles of his own religion', would not 'charitably tolerate such men as these'?

But it has not been so. Although Protestants have been tolerated in Catholic countries, even France, in England one Protestant sometimes 'persecutes the other upon every slight pretence.' The excuse is usually that 'he enjoins only things indifferent.' But what an argument is this? If they are truly things indifferent, 'let them be so still; who gave him authority to change their nature by enjoining them?' For anything indifferent, 'if it come once to be imposed, is either a command or a prohibition, and so consequently an addition to the Word of God, which he professes to disallow.' Toleration, then, is a necessary product of basic Christian principles held by all true Protestants. And how far should dissenters be tolerated? 'Doubtless equally, as being all Protestants, that is, on all occasions to give account of their faith, either by arguing, preaching in their several assemblies, public writing, and the freedom of printing' (170–1).

Heretics, on the other hand, should not be tolerated at all. And 'Popery is the only, or the greatest, heresy' (167), 'the worst of superstitions, and the heaviest of all God's judgements' (180). The papist adds to Scripture principles of his own, and defies the Word of God with his idolatry.

Moreover, 'Popery is a double thing to deal with, and claims a twofold power, ecclesiastical and political, both usurpt, and the one supporting the other'.

> The Pope [now Clement X] by this mixed faculty pretends right to kingdoms and states, and especially to this of England; thrones and unthrones kings, and absolves the people from their obedience to them; sometimes interdicts to whole nations the public worship of God, shutting up their churches; and was wont to drain away greatest part of the wealth of this then miserable land, as part of his patrimony, to maintain the pride and luxury of his court and prelates; and now, since through the infinite mercy and favour of God we have shaken off his Babylonish yoke, hath not ceased by his spies and agents, bulls and emissaries, once to destroy both King and Parliament, perpetually to seduce, corrupt, and pervert as many as they can of the people. [171–2]

The wise magistrate, concerned with the public safety, will hardly tolerate such a political force; and the religion can be tolerated neither publicly nor privately 'as far as it is idolatrous' (172), since idolatry is both an offence to God and a scandal to conscientious beholders. Still, Milton supposed that corporal punishment and fines stood 'not with the clemency of the Gospel, more than what appertains to the security of the State'. In any case, one must first remove all the furniture of their idolatry, their idols and the Mass. 'If they say that by removing their idols we violate their consciences, we have no warrant to regard conscience which is not grounded on Scripture' (173).

Considering further the grave problem of hindering the growth of Catholicism among native Englishmen (foreigners living in England are 'privileged by the law of nations'), Milton had three pieces of counsel to offer. First, because 'want of fundamental knowledge easily turns to superstition or Popery', Englishmen should 'read duly and diligently the Holy Scriptures'. Unfortunately, 'most men in the course and practice of their lives' set wealth or honour 'before the wisdom of salvation', and 'through unwillingness to take the pains of understanding their religion by their own diligent study, would fain be saved by a deputy.' But 'neither let the countryman, the tradesman, the lawyer, the physician, the statesman, excuse himself by his much business' when salvation and England's safety are at stake. The frequent and serious reading of Scripture 'will soonest pull Popery down' (175–6).

In stating his second means, Milton made his final appeal for toleration and for the basic freedoms which had always been so dear to him. In Scripture, he began, Christians 'are everywhere exhorted to mutual forbearance and charity one towards the other, though dissenting in some opinions' (176).

> If he who thinks himself in the truth professes to have learnt it, not by implicit faith, but by attentive study of the Scriptures and full persuasion of heart, with what equity can he refuse to hear or read him who demonstrates to have gained

> his knowledge by the same way? Is it a fair course to assert truth by arrogating to himself the only freedom of speech, and stopping the mouths of others equally gifted? . . . They pretend it would unsettle the weaker sort; the same groundless fear is pretended by the Romish clergy in prohibiting the Scripture. At least, then, let them have leave to write in Latin, which the common people understand not, that what they hold may be discussed among the learned only. [177–8]

When he dictated this last sentence, was Milton thinking of his own *De Doctrina Christiana*, still awaiting a hospitable, or at least a safe, period for publication? And were faint echoes of *Areopagitica* in his mind as he continued?

> There is no learned man but will confess he hath much profited by reading controversies, his senses awaked, his judgement sharpened, and the truth which he holds more firmly established. If then it be profitable for him to read, why should it not at least be tolerable and free for his adversary to write? . . . all controversies being permitted, falsehood will appear more false, and truth the more true . . . [178]

'The Papist with open mouth makes much advantage' of the intolerance and dissension among Protestants. 'To save ourselves, therefore, and resist the common enemy, it concerns us mainly to agree within our selves' (177).

Knowing (and sharing) the popular view that the recent Plague, Fire, and even the Dutch war were divine punishments for England's moral collapse, Milton made his third and final point. 'The last means to avoid Popery is to amend our lives. It is a general complaint that this nation of late years is grown more numerously and excessively vicious than heretofore—pride, luxury, drunkenness, whoredom, cursing, swearing, bold and open atheism everywhere abounding. Where these grow, no wonder if Popery also grow apace' (178). 'God, when men sin outrageously and will not be admonished, gives over chastising them perhaps by pestilence, fire, sword, or famine—which may all turn to their good—and takes up His severest punishments: hardness, besottedness of heart, and idolatry—to their final perdition' (179).

Such was Milton's little tract *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration, and what best means may be used against the growth of Popery.* It was a slight performance, a quarto of only fourteen printed pages, but its directness and unpretentiousness made it a persuasive, if un-Miltonic, argument. He had written only what seemed to him plain 'to common apprehension', not entering 'into the labyrinth of Councils and Fathers' (165), that 'entangled wood' he had long ago learned to distrust. With much that he said, any Protestant reader could readily agree. The parts not so acceptable were, moreover, highly coloured with an appeal to emotions already present in the reader: fear of the papists, fear of weakness through division, and fear of God's further judgement on England for her immorality. Considering the occasion, one can understand, if one cannot condone, Milton's last attack on Catholicism; and quite apart from the occasion it is interesting to find this former enemy of the Church of England now willing to tolerate it if it, in turn, will tolerate all Protestant sects. Just as the cry of 'No Popery' had taught King Charles, half-French and educated abroad, something important about the temper of his subjects, Milton too, it would seem, learned something from the threat to English Protestantism.

The further biographical significance of his tract is difficult to assess. Are its silences, its rhetorical emphases, indicative of changes in Milton's religious views? Had he abandoned hope of a disestablishment? Had he lost faith in individual spiritual illumination? Had his opinion of what constitutes heresy reduced itself to such harshly simple terms? Most such inferences are surely unwarranted in the light of either the situation which provoked *Of True Religion* or what we otherwise know of Milton and his attitudes. Although *Of True Religion* may be deficient in ardour and in eloquence, it is probably no more disinterested a document than were *Areopagitica* and *The Doctrine of Divorce*. It is a calculated piece of writing, calmly and carefully aimed at a target, by a man who has painfully learned to think first of what is possible, and worry later about the refinements. We must remember that he still hoped to give his *De Doctrina Christiana* to the learned world. It had to be a world in which a Christian, basing his beliefs firmly on the Bible, could publish those beliefs with impunity even if they differed radically from accepted opinion; and in the first dozen years after the Restoration, Milton had probably despaired of such a time ever coming in England. He had, we may be sure, considered the risks of publication abroad; but events had now brought unexpectedly near a chance of publication in London itself. It was therefore something more than a sense of 'common duty' that persuaded him to lend a hand, 'how unable soever', to speed the advent of toleration. Such an effort called for no detailed exposition of his religious tenets; on the contrary, to have introduced them would have needlessly complicated the argument and needlessly alienated many readers. It was important to keep the issues simple and clear, and to link the case for toleration as closely as possible to the almost universal 'No Popery' agitation. This he accomplished, suppressing both Miltonic periods and Miltonic erudition. Perhaps the only concession to his very personal hopes was his explicit plea, repeated in the short tract, for toleration of Arians, Arminians, and Anabaptists. But in general he was simplifying an argument for the sake of being allowed, later, to elaborate it.

An unknown admirer, in 1675, made this comment on toleration: 'J. Milton has said more for it in two elegant sheets of true religion, heresy, and schism than all the prelates can refute in seven years.'[49] Others may have felt the same. In point of fact, the dual principles of toleration and parliamentary supremacy, asserted by the Commons in March 1673, were soon to produce the Whig party, which eventually effected many glorious reforms. But also, in point of fact, the actions of March 1673 caused the popular fear of Popery to recede temporarily, and with it faded the grateful intentions of the Parliament towards the nonconformists. Milton's tract, like others which appeared in that year on behalf of toleration, had no perceptible effect.

*Of True Religion* was most carelessly printed; in order to save paper the type was reduced and crowded on the last two pages. Unregistered and presumably unlicensed, the pamphlet had in its imprint no indication of bookseller or printer; it was signed merely 'J. M.' Although there was nothing treasonable and nothing offensive to Protestants in its contents, to many who read it those initials may have suggested that a once notorious 'J. M.' was returning to political controversy and that his publisher was frightened by what might happen next. In any case, nothing happened, and the bookseller, Thomas Sawbridge, ventured to advertise the pamphlet in the Easter term *Catalogue of Books* for sale, even giving the author's full name.[50]

In the same term *Catalogue* Sawbridge advertised another recent work, printed at Oxford and published anonymously, entitled *The Transproser Rehearsed, or the Fifth Act of Mr. Bayes's Play.*[51] This was a 154-page reply to Part One of Andrew Marvell's *Rehearsal Transprosed* (1672), a satirical attack on Samuel Parker, now Archdeacon of Canterbury.[52] Parker had written vigorously against the nonconformists; Marvell had ridiculed his arguments (with topical humour borrowed from Buckingham's farce, *The Rehearsal*); and now, with *The Transproser Rehearsed*, Marvell himself was being ridiculed. It was perhaps inevitable that Milton's name should be introduced into such a controversy; but neither Marvell nor Milton was prepared for the savage onslaught of the new participant, who spoke contemptuously of *Paradise Lost* and referred altogether to ten of Milton's pamphlets. Quoting the blind poet's address to Light from the beginning of Book Three of the epic, the anonymous writer sneered, 'No doubt but the thoughts of this "vital lamp" lighted a Christmas candle in his brain.' He ridiculed other phrases from the poem, denounced the 'blind schoolmaster' as an obscene mountebank, and labelled his immediate opponent as a 'fellow journeyman' of Milton:

> O marvellous fate, O fate full of marvel,
> That Nol's Latin pay two clerks should deserve ill!
> Hiring a gelding and Milton the stallion,
> His Latin was gelt, and turned pure Italian.

All told, there were about seventeen references to Milton throughout the book.

Stung by this unprovoked attack, the battle-scarred veteran promptly composed a reply. Like the mud-slinging opponents of his *Animadversions* and *Doctrine of Divorce*, the author of *The Transproser Rehearsed* aroused Milton's fury; and once more, despite his resolutions and his thirteen years of careful retirement, he prepared to castigate a nameless critic. Some amanuensis wrote down the scorching words as the blind man dictated them.

But this rebuttal was never to see print. Phillips tells us: 'He had, as I remember, prepared for the press an answer to some little scribing quack in London, who had written a scurrilous libel against him; but whether by the dissuasion of friends, as thinking him a fellow not worth his notice, or for what other cause I know not, this answer was never published.'[53] We know nothing more of Milton's second *Colasterion.* Additional tracts appeared in the Marvell–Parker controversy: one of them, entitled *S'too Him Bayes*, observed: 'Come, you had all this out of the Answerer of Salmasius';[54] another, called *A Commonplace Book out of the Rehearsal Transprosed*, declared that Marvell 'seems to have learned his Accidence, but not Grammar', and referred him 'to blind M.'.[55] In the 536 pages of *A Reproof to the Rehearsal Transprosed*, Archdeacon Parker also alluded ironically to 'a friend of ours that has vindicated' rebellion 'against a learned man abroad that indiscreetly and injudiciously enough objected' to it. Quoting from *Areopagitica*, Parker noted that 'such fustian bombast as this passed for stately wit and sense in that age of politeness and reformation', when 'the writings of J. M.' defended 'rebellion and the murder of the King'. Parker nowhere mentioned John Milton by name.[56]

It was probably Marvell who persuaded Milton not to enter the controversy. He was distressed by what had happened, and felt personally responsible. Convinced that Parker had written, not only the *Reproof*, but also the abusive *Transproser Rehearsed*, he decided that a frank appeal to the sportsmanship of the reading public was the best possible defence of Milton. In *The Rehearsal Transprosed: The Second Part*, published in 1673, he accused Parker thus:

> You do three times at least in your *Reproof*, and in your *Transproser Rehearsed* well nigh half the book through, run upon an author J. M., which does not a little offend me. For why should any other man's reputation suffer in a contest betwixt you and me? But it is because you resolved to suspect that he had an hand in my former book, wherein, whether you deceive yourself or no, you deceive others extremely. For by chance I had not seen him of two years before; but after I undertook writing, I did more carefully avoid either visiting or sending to him, lest I should any way involve him in my consequences. And you might have understood, or I am sure your friend the author of the *Commonplaces* could have told you (he too had a slash at J. M. upon my account), that had he took you in hand, you would have had cause to repent the occasion, and not escaped so easily as you did under my *Transprosal*. . . . J. M. was, and is, a man of great learning and sharpness of wit as any man. It was his misfortune, living in a tumultuous time, to be tossed on the wrong side, and he wrote

> *flagrante bello* certain dangerous treatises. . . . At his Majesty's happy return, J. M. did partake, even as you yourself did for all your huffing, of his regal clemency, and has ever since expiated himself in a retired silence. It was after that, I well remember it, that being one day at his house, I there first met you and accidentally. . . . then it was when you, as I told you, wandered up and down Moorfields astrologizing upon the duration of his Majesty's Government, that you frequented J. M. incessantly and haunted his house day by day. What discourses you there used, he is too generous to remember. But he never having in the least provoked you, for you to insult thus over his old age, to traduce him by your *Scaramuccios* and in your own person as a Schoolmaster, who was born and hath lived much more ingenuously and liberally than yourself; to have done all this, and lay at last my simple book to his charge, without ever taking care to inform yourself better, which you had so easy opportunity to do . . . it is inhumanely and inhospitably done, and will I hope be a warning to all others, as it is to me, to avoid (I will not say such a Judas but) a man that creeps into all companies to jeer, trepan, and betray them. [377-80]

To this stinging rebuke Parker never replied. Much as we might like to have had another composition from Milton himself, we must acknowledge —as Milton probably acknowledged—that Marvell's handling of the problem was more dignified and more effective. It was a wise and noble defence of a friend.[57]

In 1645, when he had felt dirtied by the unexpected notoriety of his divorce tracts, and worried about his public image, Milton had published his collected *Poems*. Was it only coincidence that in 1673, when he was chafing at the latest attacks upon his reputation, he decided to bring out a second edition of his minor verse? The little volume was advertised for sale by a bookseller named Thomas Dring in the Michaelmas term *Catalogue of Books*; its price, bound, was two shillings and sixpence, and it included, as an appendix, a reprint of the 1644 tract *Of Education*.[58] The decision to add this—to mix pedagogy and poetry—may well have been prompted by a recent slur from another source. In a much reprinted book, first published in 1670, John Eachard had told his readers: 'I am not, I'll assure you, any of those occasional writers that, missing preferment in the university, can presently write you their new ways of education, or, being a little tormented with an ill-chosen wife, set forth the Doctrine of Divorce to be truly evangelical.'[59]

The *Poems* collected and printed in 1673 had all been written long before. Every piece that we can date with complete assurance belongs to the thirty-year period from 1624 to 1655. There are, in all, eighty-seven shorter poems, numbering 5,344 lines, which Milton was willing to acknowledge and publish. Looking back over the body of this verse we can observe a number of interesting facts and emphases. Of a total of ninety-one minor poems (including four sonnets omitted from the 1673 collection but added by Phillips in 1694), twenty-one are translations. The remaining seventy *original* poems include two in Greek, six in Italian, twenty-six in Latin, and thirty-six in English. Exactly half of the thirty-six in English are sonnets. One out of every five of the original poems is addressed to a woman; one out of every three, to a man. Of the thirty-nine addressed to specific people, thirteen are elegies. Few of the original poems are predominantly religious in subject. Three celebrate church holidays; *On Time*, *At a Solemn Music*, and several of the sonnets have a strong devotional tone; but these are all. Milton's minor poetry, apart from the translations, is largely secular in theme with pious thoughts interspersed. There is more amorous than religious verse: five sonnets and a *canzone* in Italian, the seventh elegy, and the nightingale sonnet are all love poetry; and so, with a rueful difference, is *Methought I saw my late espousèd saint*. (His greatest love poetry, however, had been reserved for *Paradise Lost*.)

There is a pleasantly large amount of satiric and whimsical verse. The Greek epigram on the unsuccessful engraver, the sonnet on *Tetrachordon*, the two Hobson epitaphs, the burlesque on the Platonic Idea, the exordium to *L'Allegro*, and the tailed sonnet on the new forcers of conscience —all exhibit a variety of genuine humour. There are, moreover, delightfully humorous touches in other poems, such as the *Ode to Rouse*, the *Vacation Exercise*, the sixth elegy to Diodati, the sonnet on the Royalist threat to London, and the cordial sonnets of invitation to young Lawrence and Skinner. Milton could be amusing when occasion allowed, and posterity has often cheated itself by overlooking the twinkle in some of his verses.

The fact that more than half of Milton's poems are addressed to definite people tells us something about his soul in relation to romantic stars that dwell apart. To read through these poems is to become aware of the author's associations with other human beings. He introduces us to his unusual father, a dearly beloved wife, his baby niece, and his boyhood sweetheart. He tells us of his affection for Diodati, Lawes, Young, Margaret Ley, Mrs. Thomason, Lawrence, Skinner, King, and old Hobson. We see him entertaining the Countess Dowager of Derby and the Earl of Bridgewater. We hear of his admiration for Leonora, Manso, Salzilli, Rouse, Fairfax, Cromwell, and Vane. For our benefit he praises the departed Shakespeare, Ridding, Andrewes, Felton, Gostlin, and the Marchioness of Winchester. He makes us conscious of still other persons, unnamed, within and without his circle: convivial Cambridge undergraduates, hypocritical Presbyterians, Royalist officers, martyred Waldenses, a pious young lady, a wretched portraitist, an ignorant stall-reader. In sum, the Milton that we meet in the minor poems is a writer with a distinctly social tone.

The blind man who a few years before the Restoration calmly undertook 'things unattempted yet in prose or rime' was already a skilled and confident poet, with no slight achievement behind him. Regarded as a preparation for *Paradise Lost*, the shorter poems become a search for a sure and distinctive style, an effort by a conscious artist to develop his own manner. Mastery of technique came early. *Lycidas* was a pure jewel of metrical and verbal craftsmanship, and in *Comus* Milton taught himself to sustain and vary the rimeless march of blank verse. By 1638, when he was planning an 'Arthuriad', he already possessed the technical skill necessary for an epic flight; and he realized the fact. On the other hand, his style, the verbal image of his mind, had grown with the growth of his individuality, and in 1638 it still awaited the maturity of experience and attitude which events alone could bring. Age and awareness of decorum were not enough. Milton's reading of classical criticism gave him the first lessons in good style: he learned what to avoid; he learned to seek the unique word appropriate to the subject. But the last lesson, the finding of a style which is noble because it is natural, life had yet to teach. The style could not proclaim the Milton of *Paradise Lost* until Milton had lost his own paradise of youthful, unsophisticated idealism. The minor poems may be viewed, then, as an intimate record of Eden and the Fall and the enduring spirit of man, as these ancient symbols became manifest in the poet's experience. The record is fragmentary and unintentional, but it is there.

To read all of Milton's minor verse in approximately chronological order, from the first psalm paraphrase to the last sonnet, is to set sail for a time in the pleasant calm of youth, to enjoy the occasional cross-currents of adolescence, to relish the peace and equanimity of uninterrupted leisure and a life still to be lived. Then, suddenly, it is to sense the threat of approaching storm, to experience the storm head-on with indignation and courage, to know the agony of strain and loss, and, at last, to emerge into another calm that is not like the calm of youth because it has been fought for and earned. This is a voyage anyone may make. The only passport needed is a sympathetic imagination.

Another record of Milton's spiritual searching, supplementing the record found in the minor poetry, exists of course in the pre-Restoration prose. The time and energy he devoted to pamphleteering were amply if ironically rewarded; it turned out, not at all as he had planned, but better than he could have planned. It would be ridiculous to suppose that *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* would have been greater if the prose had never been written; but certainly they would have been different. Milton early recognized his artist's need for a deeper understanding of human problems, and after seeking it in books and in travel, he found it more abundantly among his neighbours who fought and killed each other for peace on earth. The strength of his noblest verse lies in first-hand experience of revolution and dictatorship and reaction, reflected painfully and periodically in his prose. His initial theological belief in man's sinful nature hardened from callow impatience into a cold disillusion, while, simultaneously, his youthful concept of inner liberty, sorely tested, grew into a burning conviction of humanity's need for a 'paradise within'.

The year 1673, in which Milton had chosen to republish his *Poems*, was a year of disturbing events in the life of the nation. During February and March, as we have noted, the Cavalier Parliament vigorously fought the King on the constitutional issue. In May, June, and August there were disastrous naval battles with the Dutch. On 30 September the King's brother, James, married Mary of Modena, a Catholic princess. On 9 November Shaftesbury was dismissed as Lord Chancellor. Despite these disquieting affairs, London booksellers continued to make their hopeful contributions to English literature, publishing such varied fare as the *Works* of Davenant, Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode*, Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover*, and Gilbert Burnet's *Mystery of Iniquity Unveiled*. A book that may have been called to Milton's attention was the anonymous *Case of Divorce and Re-marriage*, written by Sir Charles Wolseley. In Richard Brome's *Britannia* there were references, not only to Christopher Milton of Ipswich, but also to Richard Powell 'of Forest Hill, Esq.'. On 30 April 1673 the Powell family finally re-acquired rights in their old home, the manor at Forest Hill where Milton had met and courted his first wife.[60] The Powells had flourished since the Restoration, and Milton's mother-in-law was still alive. Would she and her son now pay the £1,000 that had been promised Milton as Mary's dowry, and promised again in the will of Mary's father? Who can blame the blind poet if he occasionally wondered?

On 1 November 1673 Milton's brother-in-law, Thomas Agar, died at the age of seventy-six. Leaving no sons by Anne or his first wife, he was succeeded as Deputy Clerk of the Crown Office by Thomas Milton, Christopher's eldest living son, who had been admitted to the Inner Temple three years before. Agar's will made no mention of any Miltons and no mention of his stepson, John Phillips, but to Edward Phillips he bequeathed £200, 'to be laid out in the purchase of an annuity for his life, or some place of employment for his better subsistence'. Agar had previously tried, and failed, to secure for Edward the royal grant of his office as Clerk of Appeals.[61] Edward was still without regular employment, and evidently had spent his inheritance long since. He was still doing hackwork for London booksellers, and at the time of Agar's death was compiling, from scattered books and previous catalogues, a semi-bibliographical account of all poets, ancient and modern.

One day, probably in February of 1674, though possibly earlier, two of the most famous modern poets called upon Milton at his house in Bunhill. These distinguished visitors were John Dryden, the poet laureate, and old Edmund Waller, perennial Member of Parliament. Milton received them very civilly; he had heard, no doubt, of Dryden's great admiration for *Paradise Lost*. Eventually, of course, the talk turned to matters of prosody. Dryden later reported that, on this or some other visit, Milton acknowledged to him that Spenser was his 'original'. (Humphrey Moseley had said, in publishing Milton's *Poems* in 1645, that the poems of Spenser 'are as rarely imitated, as sweetly excelled'.) The poet laureate was concerned, however, about something of more immediate importance to him than problems of poetic influence. He had come, in fact, to ask the blind man's permission to turn *Paradise Lost* into 'an heroic opera'—to be written in riming couplets.

Milton, we are told, considered this unexpected request, and replied: 'Well, Mr. Dryden, it seems you have a mind to tag my points, and you have my leave to tag them. But some of them are so awkward and old-fashioned that I think you had as good leave them as you found them.'[62]

Thus, with gentle irony, and with an apposite reference to the then-fashionable metal knobs worn at the ends of laces, Milton put a witty schism between himself and the tinkling world of Restoration verse. Dryden, having got what he wanted, set to work, finishing his adaptation, he tells us, within a month. On 17 April 1674 there was registered for publication his manuscript entitled 'The Fall of Angels and Man in Innocence'. This book, however, was not printed until three years later.[63] Perhaps Samuel Simmons objected; his consent was legally required for any adaptation of the epic. If Simmons took steps to hinder Dryden, we do not know what they were, but we do know that in July 1674 a new edition of *Paradise Lost* was advertised for sale. One suspects that Dryden was not permitted to publish his opera until this second edition of Milton's poem had been exhausted.

The second edition, although advertised as 'revised and augmented by the same author', actually contained few changes.[64] By splitting Books Seven and Ten, the two longest sections of the original version, Milton had organized his work into twelve books instead of ten. This necessitated brief transitional verses for the new sections; and there were occasional verbal revisions elsewhere. The 'arguments' for the twelve books were printed, of course, in their proper places, instead of in a block at the beginning of the poem. The pages, unnumbered in the first edition, were now numbered; but the marginal numbering of the lines by tens, a convenience of the first edition, was for some reason omitted. The volume itself was a small octavo, and copies were obtainable with the Dolle copy of Faithorne's portrait of Milton, already used in the *Artis Logicæ* of 1672.[65]

Prefixed to this second edition were two commendatory poems, one in Latin elegiacs by Dr. Samuel Barrow, the other in English riming couplets by Andrew Marvell. Summarizing the epic, Barrow was hyperbolic in praise: 'Whoever reads these lines will think that Homer sang only of frogs, Virgil only of fleas.' Significantly, he saw that Milton's Satan 'walks hardly less great than Michael himself', and he began his tribute with a question that still has point: 'You who read *Paradise Lost*, why do you read it except complete?'[66] Marvell's verses are especially interesting for their allusion to Dryden's recent visit, and for their humorous apology for using rime in praise of blank verse:

> Jealous I was that some less skilful hand
> (Such as disquiet always what is well,
> And by ill imitating would excel)
> Might hence presume the whole Creation's day
> To change in scenes, and show it in a play.
> Pardon me, mighty poet, nor despise
> My causeless, yet not impious, surmise.
> But I am now convinced, and none will dare
> Within thy labours to pretend a share.
> Thou hast not missed one thought that could be fit,
> And all that was improper dost omit:
> So that no room is here for writers left
> But to detect their ignorance, or theft. . . .
> Well mightst thou scorn thy readers to allure
> With tinkling rime, of thy own sense secure;
> While the Town-Bayes writes all the while and spells,
> And like a pack-horse tires without his bells.
> Their fancies like our bushy points appear,
> The poets tag them, we for fashion wear.
> I, too, transported by the mode, offend,
> And while I meant to *praise* thee must *commend*. . . .[67]

These witty lines were not calculated to increase the happiness of John Dryden, who had been known derisively as 'Mr. Bayes' since the production of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. It is a wonder that Milton allowed the poem to be published, and it is much to Dryden's credit that his admiration for Milton continued, and even grew, despite such sniping from one of Milton's devoted friends. There were those who early taxed Milton 'for his choice of a supernatural argument', but to the poet laureate these were 'false critiques', and he was soon to tell them so.[68]

In 1674 the blind poet was sixty-five years old, and he continued to dispose of his various unpublished papers. It was perhaps then, perhaps earlier, that he entrusted to Thomas Ellwood, as a completely reliable person, his valuable collection of original letters and papers of state addressed to Oliver Cromwell, concerning the affairs of Great Britain from the year 1649 to 1658.[69] These documents, private, political, and military, Milton may have acquired with a view to continuing his *History of Britain* up to the present, but more likely it was simply his instincts as an historian (encouraged perhaps by his association with George Thomason) that prompted him to make the collection. In any case, the letters to Cromwell (together with other papers in his 'political collections') needed to be disposed of safely; his widow would not know what to do with them, possession of them might even prove dangerous, and he wanted to make certain that they did not come into either careless or revengeful hands. Eventually (it was not to be until 1743), it might be possible to publish them for the edification of posterity.

In 1674 Milton learned that such documents could not be published during his lifetime. Urged by the Danish resident to print the letters of state which he himself had translated into Latin during the interregnum,[70] he had, as I have already noted, asked young Daniel Skinner to transcribe and arrange these letters for the press; and in 1674 a bookseller, Brabazon Aylmer, was found willing to publish the collection, along with a representative collection of Milton's personal letters, some of them, at least, carefully revised. However, when application was made to the authorities, permission to print was emphatically refused. The licenser, Roger L'Estrange, was willing to pass the personal letters, if Aylmer wished to go ahead with them, but severe punishment awaited anyone involved in the publication of the letters of state. Rebuffed, Milton bequeathed these, and also the manuscript of his *De Doctrina Christiana*, to his faithful amanuensis, probably recommending that he try eventually for publication abroad. It may have been at this same time, and for similar reasons, that Milton gave or left his impersonal political collections to Ellwood.

Cheated of handling the letters of state, the bookseller, Aylmer, considered printing the private letters alone. There were, however, only thirty-one of these in the manuscript which had been prepared for him—hardly enough to justify the expense of publication. Negotiating with Milton through a mutual friend, perhaps Millington, Aylmer begged for additional unpublished material, anything that might serve 'as a make-weight, to counterbalance the paucity of the letters, or at least occupy the blank'. Milton was glad to oblige. He sent the bookseller, not only the manuscript of his brief history of Muscovia, which he had written long ago, but also—encouraged by the mutual friend—the manuscripts of seven of the academic exercises he had composed as a student at Cambridge. Aylmer was pleased with the juvenile productions, and decided to publish them with the letters at once. The history of Muscovia, if supplemented by similar materials (what did he have in mind?), might be worth printing later. And so, in the Easter term *Catalogue of Books* (licensed on 26 May 1674), Aylmer advertised for sale *Joannis Miltonii Angli*, *Epistolarum Familiarium Liber Unus: quibus Accesserunt*, *ejusdem*, *jam olim in Collegio Adolescentis*, *Prolusiones Quædam Oratoriæ* ('a book of the familiar letters of John Milton, Englishman, to which have been added certain oratorical exercises of the same writer, done when he was still a youth in college'). On 1 July the little book of 156 pages was entered in the Stationers' Registers as officially licensed by Roger L'Estrange.[71]

During the summer of 1674, still uncertain about what to do with the short history of Muscovia, Aylmer asked Milton if he were willing to do an English translation of a document newly arrived from Poland—a Latin declaration issued soon after 5 June, announcing the election on 22 May of John Sobieski as King John III of the Poles. Aylmer, having decided that such important news from abroad would find enough interested readers to warrant publication, doubtless offered Milton a small sum to provide an English version. Milton certainly needed the money, and it is possible that he saw an oblique justification of Cromwell in the free election of a famous warrior to the sovereignty of a grateful nation. In any case, his translation was printed in due time, without, however, any indication of the translator. Milton's last publication, like his first, appeared anonymously. It was entitled: *A Declaration, or Letters Patents of the Election of this present King of Poland, John the Third, Elected on the 22^d^ of May last past.*[72] It is a final reminder that its translator was a man of broadly European culture, interested to the end in international affairs.

In the last years of his life Milton was an extraordinarily serene person. Visited often by admiring friends and even strangers, he gave no impression of either bitterness or complacency. Cheerful, busy with his various publishing projects, he was a man obviously fulfilling himself, rounding out a long and productive career. In this work, and occasional teaching, 'he in great serenity spent his time', we are told by his earliest biographer. His recent portraits had shown an old man with a lean, lined face and an almost morose expression; but his wife objected vigorously to these, and Deborah, recalling her father as having 'brown, lank hair' and 'a fair complexion, a little red in his cheeks', later told people that he was 'delightful company, the life of the conversation', a man of 'unaffected cheerfulness and civility'. The Miltons' maidservant in this period, and her sister too, remembered him as 'very merry'. Another early biographer (this testimony merits repetition) noted that he was 'extremely pleasant in his conversation' at the table, and in general 'of a very cheerful humour'. Those who knew him well found his deportment 'sweet and affable'.[73]

Faithorne probably did his best to portray accurately the blind man who was patiently sitting for him, but a later artist, Jonathan Richardson, attempted a few word-pictures that make a welcome contrast with the more formal pose: 'I have heard many years since that he used to sit in a grey, coarse cloth coat at the door of his house, near Bunhill Fields without Moorgate, in warm sunny weather to enjoy the fresh air, and so, as well as in his room, received the visits of people of distinguished parts, as well as quality.' One visitor told Richardson that 'in a small house (he thinks but one room on a floor; in that, up one pair of stairs, which was hung with a rusty green) he found John Milton sitting in an elbow chair, black clothes and neat enough, pale but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk stones. Among other discourse he expressed himself to this purpose: that was he free from the pain this gave him, his blindness would be tolerable.'[74]

It is likely that Milton suffered almost constantly from the gout during the last years of his life, eventually finding it too painful even to walk. The attacks were most severe in the spring and autumn. The pain then must have been such as would have soured the disposition of any ordinary mortal, but this was a man who had patiently ordered and made sure his convictions, who had come to terms with life as he found it, and who was not going to be mastered by blindness or any other kind of physical disability. One early biographer noted that, although 'his knuckles were all callous, yet was he not ever observed to be very impatient.' Another reported, with obvious admiration: 'He would be cheerful even in his gout-fits, and sing.'[75] Death, when it came to this man, would be the end of a song.

Christopher Milton, bencher of the Inner Temple, made it a point to visit his elder brother at intervals. On or about 20 July 1674, after the end of the Trinity term, he made one of these calls; he was planning to leave London and return to Ipswich for the summer vacation. His coach left about noon, and so he went that morning to the little house in Artillery Walk. Climbing the familiar stairs, he found his brother in his own chamber, obviously 'not well', but perfectly lucid and calm. Betty Milton was there with her husband, and the maidservant, Elizabeth Fisher, was occasionally in and out of the room. Later, Christopher had sad reason to recall the scene clearly.

As nearly as he could recollect, John at some point in their conversation said to him, 'Brother, the portion due to me from Mr. Powell, my former wife's father, I leave to the unkind children I had by her; but I have received no part of it, and my will and meaning is they shall have no other benefit of my estate than the said portion and what I have besides done for them, they having been very undutiful to me. And all the residue of my estate I leave to the disposal of Elizabeth, my loving wife.'[76]

A stiffly formal statement this, as remembered later by a lawyer. But legal language aside, the sentiment does not sound like that of a Christian poet who had preached charity and forgiveness to others, and had tried to practise these virtues; nor does it sound like the serene Milton pictured for us by his earliest biographers. It is clear that he had made no such statement when his brother had visited him before, and his three daughters had lived away from home for four or five years. Had something happened recently to upset him? The month was July, and on 1 June, in far-away Dublin, Deborah Milton had married a weaver named Abraham Clarke.[77] Did she perhaps, in a proud letter, present her father with a *fait accompli*, flaunting the independence she had come by so naturally? We shall never know. We do not even know whether Milton learned of this marriage before his death; from subsequent events it is certain that Deborah's two sisters had not heard. A bond that Milton received on 27 July from one

Richard Hayley of Elstree, Hertfordshire, may or may not have some bearing on the case; the nature of this business transaction is unclear.[78]

As a lawyer, Christopher should have done one of two things if he had thought his brother in any real danger of dying soon. He should have told him to commit his will to paper, or he should have called for proper witnesses to this oral, nuncupative will. He did neither. We shall never know why. Perhaps he took the whole matter lightly, and feared to miss the Ipswich coach. Milton, on the other hand, seems to have regarded the business as settled. He was the son of a scrivener, the brother of an attorney; he had argued points of law with the great Salmasius; but in the managing of his own last will and testament he acted like a complete innocent. Soon after his conversation with Christopher, perhaps at noon the same day, he and his wife were having dinner together in his lodging-chamber and the maidservant heard him talk very gaily, saying: 'God have mercy, Betty! I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise in providing me such dishes as I think fit whilst I live; and, when I die, thou knowest that I have left thee all.'[79] (So he believed; but in this, as in so many other things during his life, Milton's wishes were eventually to be frustrated.)

Meanwhile, August came, and then September and October, bringing with them, as before, more painful attacks of the gout. It was a year fateful to English poetry, although men would not recognize the fact until centuries later. Thomas Traherne died, mourned only by a few friends. Robert Herrick died, his passing unnoticed by a public enjoying the *Poems and Songs* of Thomas Flatman. In early November, probably on Sunday, 8 November, one month before his sixty-sixth birthday, John Milton died at night 'in a fit of the gout, but with so little pain or emotion that the time of his expiring was not perceived by those in the room.'[80] If by chance he was dreaming of his Heavenly Muse, she did not flee when next he woke. His long night ended at last.

On Thursday, 12 November, he was buried at St. Giles, Cripplegate, in the upper end of the chancel, at the right hand. Since his own father was also lying in this church, he 'had this elogy in common with the patriarchs and kings of Israel—that he was gathered to his people'. So wrote an early biographer. Another tells us that 'all his learned and great friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the vulgar, accompanied his body' to its last resting-place. Among those who carried the coffin was, appropriately, at least one bookseller.[81]

* * *

Thus ends the life story of John Milton, poet of paradises lost and regained, ardent advocate of a 'paradise within'. It is essentially a story of sometimes baffled humanity rising to triumphant artistry. In the revolutionary England of his hopeful manhood he sought but never found the beauty of discipline, the strength of right reason, which seemed to him necessary to true Christian liberty; and so he created these things, not only in immortal verse, but also, to a still inspiring degree, in his own indomitable and immortal self. No other English poet discovered more painfully what weak and inconsistent creatures we mortals really are. No other English poet tells us more persuasively what reasonable and godlike creatures we mortals can yet become, if only we will learn obedience, and love virtue, and seek our freedom wisely by first earning it.

Let us not evade, however, one final question, even before the epilogue. In the severe perspective of human history, what good had been served by this man's having lived? Unlike Cromwell and Clarendon and many others whom we have met in these pages, he played a very minor role in the political events of his time. This is fact, despite his occasional attempts to persuade us otherwise. Unlike Hobbes and Locke and others of his century, he developed no philosophical system to influence society in ages to come. He was innocent of economic problems; he exhibited but slight awareness of the world-shaking scientific discoveries of his time. Looking backward, we can approve evidences of 'modernity' in his thought, but it is nevertheless true that he developed not one theory or principle which our modern world can accept without serious reservations. More than most of his contemporaries he advocated religious toleration and political freedom, but always he shied away from the implications of his own logic, and there seems to have been expediency mixed with principle in his advocacy. Let me say it plainly: Milton was simply not a profound or an original thinker. Intelligent and learned, yes; sincere and idealistic, yes; but profound and original, no.

He was, however, an original—and an unusually effective—artist. In a world where the influence of thoughts depends as much upon their expression as upon their cogency, he developed to a high degree his gift of saying things more forcefully and memorably than other men. That, basically, is why his view of many matters became important eventually. That is why, today, John Bradshaw is only a name, while John Milton is a personality. That is why we still tend to link Milton and Cromwell, even to fancy the poet as 'Oliver's Secretary'. That is why, despite its initial failure and its permanent limitations, *Areopagitica* became, and continues to be, a classic argument for certain kinds of freedom. That is why, although he would have disapproved of both communism and democracy (if he had been capable of imagining either), we associate Milton with many of our modern liberties. That is why, for believers and non-believers alike, *Paradise Lost* is still a great poem. That is why literary scholars in many lands pay respectful attention to Milton's views on countless non-literary matters, flattering themselves by stressing his modernity or by explaining his erudition. That is why, primarily, this biography has been written—that and the biographer's hope that better knowledge of the artist will lead a few more people to the rewarding and living art.

# EPILOGUE

# 16. Epilogue

JOHN MILTON's posthumous life—his early crowning as an English classic, his lighthouse stature amidst storms and shifting tides of taste, his powerful literary influence and the influence of some of his ideas—could well be the subject of another book, and, indeed, books and doctoral dissertations have been written on some of these matters. The story of his after-fame can be told bibliographically (a book yet to be written), or as chapters in histories of literature, or criticism, or thought, or pedagogy, or scholarship. It can be told almost dispassionately now, after three hundred years, though perhaps the most conspicuous fact to be reported is that the character and personality of this man have aroused deep admiration and intense dislike in many people from the time of his death to the present day. In 1687 William Winstanley growled, 'His fame is gone out like a candle in a snuff and his memory will always stink'—and then proceeded to include him in his collection of 147 *Most Famous English Poets*. Nearly a hundred years later, Dr. Johnson felt, spoke, and acted the same way. The paradox has proved timeless; noisy partisanship is still awed by *Paradise Lost*. In our own century, while some have been concerned to 'de-Massonize' Milton (a Smart expression) and still others have been concerned to dethrone him as a tyrannical influence on poetry, a vigorous, expanding literary scholarship in America has found him an increasingly attractive subject for research and criticism. I have had the strange experience of trying to dissuade one of my own students from praying to Milton every night. She was a Roman Catholic nun, and she had found him a saint, despite his harsh pronouncements on her religion. She was less like Hilaire Belloc, who saw him as a great poet with unfortunate convictions, than like Carlyle, who called him 'the moral King of authors'. It would seem that both *Paradise Lost* and Milton the man still have power to move us.

Of course he meant it to be so. By insisting that poem and poet, style and the man, are inseparable, by stamping everything he wrote with reminders of his own strong personality, he invited kinds of critical responses which Shakespeare and Homer have never elicited from readers, and never can. What Milton did not anticipate, however, but what his intention made perhaps inevitable, was that many readers eventually invented their own Milton by exaggerating certain elements of his character as he projected it, and by ignoring others. Because they found no humour in *Paradise Lost* (did they really look for it?), Milton was humourless as a human being, and this was a major flaw, making him not 'universal' like Shakespeare. Because he was a nonconformist, he was of course a 'Puritan', and all the unpleasant connotations of this word were allowed to clothe him, so that he came to be seen as narrow, bigoted, sour, and unsympathetic. Once given this premiss (denied by all the early biographers), his seriousness became severity, his sublimity became aloofness. And given these conclusions, it was but a simple matter to suppose the young Milton a smaller copy of the old—solemn, unsociable, priggish, unamiable. It was always easy to find text to support these distortions. Had not Milton (or was it Christ?) said in *Paradise Regained*: 'When I was yet a child, no childish play / To me was pleasing, all my mind was set / Serious to learn and know'? And this being so, Il Penseroso was obviously a self-portrait; L'Allegro, someone else. The baffled, disappointed poet who once hoped for a few, but fit, readers, has since had many readers; but whether some have also been 'fit', in his sense of the word, is a nice question.

Milton has paid dearly for asking us to recognize the artist along with his art. He wrote long before the Romantic Movement, which of course welcomed his point of view and, celebrating the great Rebel, completed the identification of Milton with Satan, Milton with Samson, that earlier critics had haltingly suggested. Then, as the didacticism of the major poems became increasingly unpalatable, and the theology of the epic unacceptable, the supposed autobiographical elements received even greater stress, making it possible to continue admiring the poems as the achievements of a courageous blind man, or a great patriot, or a staunch advocate of religious and political freedom. Common sense finally had to insist that everything had got out of focus. In our own time, especially between the two world wars, scholarship was at pains to prove that Milton was as much a man of the Renaissance as he was a Puritan. Mr. C. S. Lewis informed us that if we would go back and reread Addison, we might find out what *Paradise Lost* was really about. Mr. Christopher Ricks went further and showed us that eighteenth-century criticism understood the subtleties and complexities of *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford, 1963). Other writers, including this one, argued that *Samson Agonistes* is first and foremost a drama—and a great one, if read as such. Still others studied the minor poems and found them great, as poetry. Both the new scholarship and the New Criticism worked to free Milton from the autobiographical fallacy.

But arguments persist, and will of course continue. The trouble is that Milton's invitation still stands. This fact imposes an unusual responsibility on his biographer, one of which the present biographer is all too painfully aware. Milton wanted posterity to know what he was really like, and wanted it to read his verses as the characteristic utterances of such a man. That the verses can stand on their own metrical feet, and be understood and appreciated simply as poetry, is quite true, and quite irrelevant. Certain kinds of critics, trained in this rigorous approach to poetry, will—let us hope—continue exercising their craft to our profit, but most readers will continue to accept Milton's invitation, which encourages their natural curiosity as critical theory does not. It is the biographer's task, then, somehow to respect critical theory, Milton's intentions, and the natural curiosity of most readers. Hopefully, this can be done by banishing the pseudo-Milton, by ridding the poetry of its bio-critical encumbrances—which can be done by insisting that we have no right to infer from poetry an author demonstrably inconsistent with objective reality—which, in turn, can be done if the facts are carefully gathered, honestly presented, and fairly interpreted. If Milton were truly a saint, one might pray to him for supernatural aid in such an endeavour.

* * *

It remains in this final chapter to do a few things thoroughly and a few others rather superficially. We have encountered, and perhaps become interested in, a great many people—friends, associates, and relatives of the poet—and a final word must be said about some of those who outlived him, since, in a sense, a man lives on in those who knew and loved him, and in another sense lives on in his descendants. I must also, superficially (since the matter is extremely complicated, and a full account would be inappropriate), say something more coherent about Milton's posthumous fame and influence, about the reprinting and editing and translating of his works, and about his amazing adoption through the centuries by critical theorists of a variety of conflicting schools. But first let us note, and document, the pathetic sequel to my earlier account of his oral will.

On Monday, 23 November 1674, Christopher Milton filed in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury his brother's nuncupative will. The wording, as Christopher remembered it, emphasized the punitive intention: 'The portion due to me from Mr. Powell, my former wife's father, I leave to the unkind children I had by her, having received no part of it; but my meaning is, they shall have no other benefit of my estate than the said portion and what I have besides done for them, they having been very undutiful to me. All the residue of my estate I leave to the disposal of Elizabeth, my loving wife.' A week later, Mrs. Milton's solicitor, one Thompson, started legal action to have this will probated. But before the Court could decide whether or not it was a valid will, sufficiently vouched, objections had to be heard and considered.[1]

They were soon forthcoming from two of the daughters, and they took the form of nine 'interrogatories' to be tendered the three witnesses for the will, Christopher, the maidservant Elizabeth Fisher, and her sister Mary. The daughters seem not to have heard of the marriage of their sister Deborah, in far-off Dublin, but they do seem to have learned, somehow, that their stepmother intended to divide among Christopher's children any part of the estate that exceeded £1,000. The interrogatories, therefore, strongly suggested collusion. Was not Christopher acting as the widow's solicitor in the hope of personal gain? Was not Milton in perfect health when the will was spoken, but 'in a present passion or some angry humour against some or one of his children'? Were not the children, moreover, good church-goers and 'good livers', not deserving such harsh treatment? Was not one of them, Anne, 'lame and almost helpless'? Such were some of the other questions.[2]

On 5 December Christopher's answers were given and recorded.[3] Ten days later, Elizabeth and Mary Fisher also gave their replies to the nine questions.[4] What happened next has to be inferred from the final outcome of the case; positive evidence is lacking, but the facts seem clear enough. The first fact is that all the parties involved seem to have realized, at some point, that the estate left by Milton would not come to more than a pitiful £900.[5] The second fact is that Christopher Milton and Richard Powell, fellow Benchers of the Inner Temple and probably old friends, discussed the situation unemotionally and came to certain agreements, signing a bond on 22 February 1675. This document, now missing, must have involved the unpaid marriage-portion mentioned so bitterly by Milton.[6] The third fact is that the two attorneys certainly knew, and must have reminded the other parties, that had there been no oral will, the widow would immediately have been appointed administratrix, entitled to two-thirds of the estate and required to distribute the remaining third equally among the daughters. It would seem almost certain, therefore, that Christopher persuaded the widow that probate of the oral will was unlikely, and that she had better take the normal course.[7]

On 22 February, the same day on which the two lawyers reached their agreement, Anne and Mary Milton received £100 each and gave the widow formal releases or receipts.[8] Three days later, on 25 February, the Court granted the widow letters of administration.[9] The release from Deborah and her husband was not signed until 27 March, having evidently involved some correspondence, now lost. Alone of the three daughters, Deborah wanted, and got, more than money from her father's estate. The release acknowledges delivery to an intermediary—John Burrough, a cabinet-maker of Cornhill, London—of 'several goods' lately belonging to her father.[10] It is probable that the recently married couple asked for some furniture, but it is certain that Deborah later owned, not only her mother's Bible, but also a lock of her father's hair and his silver seal bearing the family arms.[11] That Milton's favourite daughter asked for some personal relics of her father is a pleasant note in the midst of so many ugly details.

There are various ways of viewing this whole business of the oral will, and most of them make the great poet of Christianity, in the last year of his life, look vindictive and heartless—hoping to disinherit his three daughters and leave everything to a wife who had fed him well. But the truth may be the exact opposite of this, and unfortunately, since there is a missing document, and since documents in any case may conceal motives, we shall probably never know for certain. Let us keep in mind, however, that the £1,000 owed Milton by the Powells was a just and legal debt. Then, let us believe Christopher when he said that the £1,000 was 'in the hands of persons of ability able to pay the same, being their grandmother and uncle'.[12] Ignoring the complicated matter of how much interest might be due after so many years, let us recognize next that, technically, Milton left an estate of at least £2,000, roughly half of it recoverable from the Powells. Had he died without making a will, his widow, as administratrix, would have been entitled to two-thirds of all this, and the reluctance of the Powells to pay their debt would then, of course, have been greatly aggravated. Although proof is lacking, it is at least possible that the scrivener's two sons, one of them an experienced lawyer, were a bit shrewder than we have hitherto realized. Talking together without being overheard, they may have seen a drastic way to force the hand of the oddly behaving Powells—and, for all we know, they may have succeeded.[13]

* * *

Let us now trace the later fortunes of the widow, the three daughters, the Powells, Christopher and his family, and others noticed in these pages. We may begin, however, by remarking that when Milton died in 1674, there were a considerable number of persons still alive who could have written his biography in an informative way, or at least contributed notably to the biographies attempted, thus making this a more interesting and reliable history. Consider his friends and associates. Andrew Marvell in May 1675 actually promised John Aubrey to supply Wood with 'minutes' of Milton, but died in August 1678, the promise evidently unfulfilled.[14] Dr. Samuel Barrow, the other person who wrote commendatory verses for the 1674 *Paradise Lost*, lived until 1682. Marchamont Needham died a few months after Marvell, and Dr. Nathan Paget in January 1679.[15] Henry Oldenburg died in 1677,[16] John Dury in 1680, Arthur Annesley in 1686,[17] Theodore Haak in 1690, Lady Ranelagh in 1691,[18] Charles Fleetwood in 1692, and Sir Robert Howard (from whom Toland seems to have gleaned a few stories) in 1698.[19] Of Milton's known students, any of whom could have told us much that we would like to know, William Davenant died in 1681, the Earl of Barrymore in 1694, Cyriack Skinner in 1700, the Earl of Ranelagh in 1712, and Thomas Ellwood in 1713.[20]

(We do not know the death dates of Sir Thomas Gardiner or of Milton's amanuenses, Jeremy Picard and Daniel Skinner.[21]) His friend, Mrs. Bridget Bendish, lived until 1726.[22] William Joyner, who claimed to be an intimate friend but contributed nothing except his assurance that Milton was not a papist, died in 1706.[23] The poet was also outlived, of course, by a number of persons who could have informed us about his activities as Latin Secretary. On the other hand, Sir Peter Wentworth, who thought well enough of him to remember him generously in his will,[24] died in 1675, as did Bulstrode Whitelocke. (Also outliving Milton by only one year were Thomas Tomkyns, the licenser of *Paradise Lost*, and the Marquis of Winchester, whose wife the poet had commemorated so long ago.)

There is a tantalizing story to the effect that one of Milton's many friends among booksellers, one, indeed, who had carried the coffin at his funeral, later wrote and published a biography which Milton's daughter, when he showed it to her, pronounced better than others already published.[25] Such a biography is now unknown. Some of his bookseller-friends were qualified, however, to write parts of his life with great authority. Thomas Newcomb, for example, lived until 1681, but could not, therefore, be the stationer in the story. Edward Millington, who died in 1703, is a candidate. Although he came to know Milton later than either of these, Brabazon Aylmer (*fl.* 1671–1707) might also be the source of the story, which could have got somewhat garbled in the telling.[26]

Considering how very little we know about Milton's life at Cambridge, it is a pity that some of his classmates at Christ's College who outlived him did not see fit to set down, or communicate to others, what they remembered. He was even survived by several Fellows of Christ's who certainly knew him: Michael Honywood died in 1681, and Francis Cooke in 1682; either could have been consulted profitably by Aubrey. As for classmates (to say nothing of numerous contemporaries), Daniel Proctor died in 1675, John Hieron and Robert Seppens in 1682, and Peter Pury in 1684.[27]

## MILTON'S WIDOW AND DAUGHTERS

Two of Milton's daughters died early and obscurely; his youngest, Deborah, who had been forced to wear spectacles from the age of eighteen, lived on for another fifty-three years, to die at last in the same month, perhaps on the same day, as the poet's widow. Anne, the eldest, the deformed one, developed into a beautiful woman, we learn from her admiring sister. Between 22 February 1675 and 24 October 1678, she married a master builder or mechanic and died in childbed of her first child, the child dying with her.[28] That is all we know about her end; but we know even less about Mary, the second daughter. It would seem that she never married, and that she died between 1681 and 1694.[29] There is nothing more that can be said. No early biographer talked to either girl about her father, and their only recorded opinions of him come to us at third hand through a servant who did not know them. Their cousin, Edward Phillips, wrote their obituaries: 'It had been happy indeed if the daughters of such a person had been made in some measure inheritrixes of their father's learning. But', he added, 'fate otherwise decreed'.[30]

After her husband's death, the widow remained in London for seven years or more, and then, her cousin Dr. Paget having died meanwhile, she removed to Nantwich in Cheshire, where she had many relatives living near by. She was evidently at church one Sunday afternoon in 1676 (or earlier) when Milton's former student William Davenant and a young apprentice named Jacob Tonson attempted to visit her, hoping to inspect the poet's library.[31] The books were probably already gone—all except a few cherished ones, including 'two books of Paradise' which she kept to her dying day.[32] Milton had 'left a fair collection', but, as we have noted, he had arranged for the sale of many of his books before his death. When Aubrey visited the widow in 1681, he hoped to be able to compile a bibliography of Milton's writings, but, unable to be of much help, she had to send him to Edward Phillips (whose first name she could not recall).[33] She still had 'a great many letters by her from learned men his acquaintance, both of England and beyond sea', but 'all his papers', including the unfinished Latin thesaurus, she had given to Phillips. (We shall see later what happened to some of them. What happened to others, and to most of the letters, is a mystery.) The manuscript of an 'Idea Theologiae' was in the hands of a Mr. Skinner, who had been her husband's disciple, and who had 'culled out what he thought fit' of Milton's books. There was another Mr. Skinner who had been one of 'his familiar learned acquaintance'. (She was not good at remembering Christian names, but Aubrey found her 'a gentle person' of 'peaceful and agreeable humour'.[34])

A third edition of *Paradise Lost* had been published in 1678, and on 21 December 1680 Samuel Simmons paid her £8 for her remaining rights in the epic.[35] On 27 October he had assigned his own rights to Brabazon Aylmer,[36] and, doubtless concerned to make the transaction completely legal (perhaps Aylmer, intending to sell the rights, had raised some question), Simmons secured from the widow a second, more formal release on 29 April 1681.[37] This is the last we shall see of Simmons, and almost the last we shall see of the widow, who probably left London for rural obscurity soon afterwards.[38] Her name appears in some uninformative legal records of 1680, 1713, 1720, and 1725.[39] As for *Paradise Lost*, it next appeared in 1688 in a sumptuous, illustrated edition, published by subscription, along with a third edition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Aylmer had formally registered the epic in his own name on 24 July 1683, and on the following 17 August had sold half his rights to Jacob Tonson. Tonson did not acquire the whole of this increasingly valuable property until 24 March 1691,[40] but he then retained it until the copyright expired, meanwhile reprinting the poem frequently. Thirty-six years and eight editions later, when a public appeal was made for the relief of Milton's poverty-stricken daughter, Deborah, someone wrote: 'I shall hope that industrious and thriving bookseller who has got so many thousand pounds by the copy of *Paradise Lost* will not be behind-hand in his contribution.'[41] There is no reason to believe that Jacob Tonson ignored this ungentle urging. The pitiful amount that Milton received for his poem was almost legendary from 1725 on,[42] and the imagined profits of publishers did nothing to diminish the poignancy.

Deborah we saw married in Dublin on 1 June 1674 to a weaver named Abraham Clarke. They had ten children, seven sons and three daughters; but of all these, we know the names of only three, only two had children of their own,[43] and in eighty years the last trace of the family disappears. We do not know when Deborah's husband died; it was after 1687, possibly in 1688, probably about 1702. The evidence is as tantalizing as it is slender. Their daughter Elizabeth was born in Ireland in November 1688, and came to England about 1703.[44] For some reason, however, Deborah returned to England earlier—'during the troubles in Ireland under King James II', we are told,[45] and if it seems improbable that she would thus leave her newly born child, we know for certain that she was living in London in 1698.[46] A further hint of some break-up in the family about 1702 is the presence, in the next year, of a son in Madras (Fort St. George), India. Significantly, Caleb Clarke and his wife Mary chose the name Abraham for the son that was baptized there on 2 June 1703.[47] In England, between 1704 and 1708, Deborah was describing herself as 'in a very low and destitute condition', and was petitioning Robert Harley, Secretary of State, for financial aid. She made it clear, however, that she was 'far more desirous to maintain herself by her care and industry than to be burdensome to any honourable person whom generosity might induce to relieve her for the respect had to her late dear father'.[48]

In Madras, Caleb and Mary had a daughter Mary, who lived to be only nine,[49] and a son Isaac, about whom nothing more is known (possibly he survived to perpetuate the family).[50] Their son Abraham, aged sixteen, was in England in 1719, probably when his aunt, Elizabeth Clarke, married Thomas Foster, a weaver.[51] Abraham returned to India after receiving news of his father's death in October 1719.[52] Caleb Clarke, probably in his early forties when he died, had been clerk of the parish since 1717. On 22 September 1725 young Abraham married an Anna Clark.[53] The Mary Clarke who was buried in Madras on 4 October 1729 may have been their daughter Mary who was baptized on 5 April 1727,[54] or may have been Abraham's mother. There is equal uncertainty about the death of Abraham himself; he may or may not have been the soldier of that name who was buried on 5 September 1743.[55] By 1738 the family in London had completely lost touch with the family in India.[56] And biography has traced them no further.

By 1738 Mrs. Elizabeth Foster had given birth to seven children of her own, all of whom had died.[57] So, at long last, had her mother, the poet's daughter. Deborah, meanwhile, had been befriended by Addison before his death in June 1719,[58] and had been visited by the engraver George Vertue in 1721.[59] Both men, one a real expert in human features, had been struck by her extraordinary resemblance to the (by now) familiar portraits of her father. Either on this occasion or another, Vertue had shown her a portrait of Milton (doubtless the original Faithorne sketch) which she had immediately recognized with an affecting display of emotion: 'O Lord! That is a picture of my father! How came you by it? Just so my father wore his hair.'[60] There had been other visitors; and Englishmen conscious of their literary heritage, who came to her lodgings 'in a mean little street near Moorfields, where she kept a school for children for her support',[61] had finally been ashamed of the irony they had felt. (From a modest house near Moorfields, sixty years before, had come the finest English classic!) It was getting almost too late, but on 29 April 1727 there had been an eloquent public appeal for her support.[62] Her failing eyesight and fading strength had compelled her to give up teaching, and she had come to live with her daughter in Pelham Street, Spitalfields.[63] The response to the appeal had been generous, even magnificent; Queen Caroline had sent her own physician, Dr. John Freind, with a gift of £50;[64] to a visiting Frenchman named Voltaire it seemed that Deborah had become rich 'in a quarter of an hour'.[65] Not quite four months later, on 24 August 1727, she had died.[66]

In Nantwich, Cheshire, unknown and almost forgotten (even Deborah, in 1721, was not sure she was still alive),[67] Milton's widow made her will on 22 August 1727, and a day or so later she too was dead.[68] A pathetic inventory of her belongings was made by friends on 26 August.[69] They were probably not connoisseurs of English literature, but the items on which the highest value was placed (ten guineas) were the two portraits of her husband. Next were a feather-bed and bolster (£2. 7*s.*).

Doubtless pleased by its display of charity, and certainly pleased by the bust of Milton placed in Westminster Abbey in 1737,[70] the literary public forgot Deborah's daughter for more than a decade, while, to eke out her husband's insufficient income as a journeyman weaver, she kept a chandler's, or grocer's, shop in Spitalfields. Another son of Deborah, Urban Clarke, came to live with them; he also was a weaver.[71] Even though there were no children to take care of, Milton's last descendants were barely above the subsistence level, as both John Ward and Thomas Birch discovered when they visited Elizabeth Foster on 10 and 11 February 1738, Birch seeking additional material for his biography of the poet which was already being set in type.[72] Nothing, however, was done until

1750, when the recent appearance of Newton's sumptuous edition of *Paradise Lost* and life of the poet focused public attention upon Milton's descendants. Meanwhile, the Fosters had moved to Lower Holloway, where they had lived in obscurity for about seven years—and where both Milton's grandson, Urban, and his brother's daughter, Catherine, had died unnoticed[73]—and then, about 1749, they had moved to Cock Lane near Shoreditch church, where Elizabeth still kept a little grocery store.[74] There, again, during the Christmas season, she had several visitors.[75] When Birch came once more on 6 January 1750 she showed him her grandmother's Bible, with the birth records of her mother and the poet's other children, which she had let Ward inspect a dozen years before.[76]

On 4 March 1738 John Dalton's adaptation of *Comus* had been presented for the first time at the Drury Lane Theatre, afterwards enjoying considerable popularity both in print and as a piece for the stage.[77] In 1750, reminded by Newton's life of Mrs. Foster's continued existence and miserable circumstances, Dr. Johnson proposed to Garrick and Lacy, managers of the Drury Lane, that a benefit performance be given, to which Johnson would gladly contribute a prologue. They agreed; literary London was charmed by the happy idea; and Elizabeth, who had no notion of what was meant by 'a benefit', was informed. The night (after one postponement) was 5 April; a full evening's entertainment was assured by adding a dramatic satire called *Lethe*; generous contributions were made by Newton, Tonson, and some others. Nevertheless, the proceeds (after deducting expenses) were a disappointing £130 and four shillings. On advice, and 'after some debate between her and her husband in whose name it should be entered', £100 of this was invested, and the Fosters used the remaining sum for another, final, change of residence, to the sign of the Sugar Loaf, opposite to the Thatched House, in Islington.[78] Conscience-stricken, admirers of the poet were publicly inviting 'subscriptions for the relief of Mrs. Elizabeth Foster, granddaughter to John Milton', in December 1750.[79] On 9 May 1754, after a long and painful bout with asthma and dropsy, the last of Milton's direct descendants died.[80] She was sixty-five. Birch, one of the best of Milton's biographers, officiated at the funeral on 14 May.[81]

## ANNE MILTON'S CHILDREN

The families of Milton's sister Anne and (perhaps) brother Christopher proved to have more durability. Anne had two children by her second husband, Thomas Agar: a daughter Mary, who 'died very young', and another daughter Anne, whom we saw married to David Moore in 1662. They lived at Sayes House, Chertsey, and when he died on 12 January 1694, aged seventy-four, his widow renounced administration of his estate in favour of their son Thomas. Thomas Moore was knighted in 1715, wrote some wretched plays, and died in 1735. By his wife, Elizabeth

Blunden, he had at least two children; a son, Edmund, born in 1696, lived until 1756. From this family have descended a number of Moores, Fitzmoores, and Dashwoods.[82]

Edward Phillips, Anne's son by her first marriage, lived to write his uncle's biography in 1694, and died perhaps two years later, aged about sixty-six.[83] His Miltonic education, his skill in languages, and his personal interest in pedagogy were never enough to bring him much distinction; he evidently had the soul of a hasty hack writer (a very early example of this sociological phenomenon, incidentally), lacking any real spirit of scholarship. Thus, although he produced a considerable number of books, even the best of them are now historical curiosities. He is remembered in both English lexicography and English bibliography for pioneering works that are shockingly careless and derivative when they might have been important milestones. His *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675), for example, which many have supposed to show the direct influence of Milton, would more likely have distressed his former teacher as a shoddy, slapdash compilation.[84] To Phillips, writing was a means of earning a living, and, appropriately, for him it proved not to be so. About 1678 he was again a tutor, having been recommended by Evelyn to Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington.[85] This job did not last long, and, having married a woman with several children, he taught school for a time in the Strand, near the Maypole. A good teacher he probably was, but even teaching did not last; in 1684 and 1685, we are told, he was without employment.[86] We do not know what happened finally to the wife, or to the stepchildren, or to Phillips himself. Yet he is indispensable to the biographer of Milton, if his chronic carelessness be kept in mind.

Milton's widow told Aubrey that she had given all her husband's papers to Phillips. What this really means staggers the imagination. What did he take? What throw away? What give or sell to others? What keep as valuable heirlooms for his nameless wife and children? We can trace surprisingly few things, and these never directly back to Phillips. Before 1691, when he gave the precious manuscript to Trinity College, Cambridge, Sir Henry Newton Puckering had acquired part (not all) of one of Milton's poetic notebooks, containing plans for dramas, drafts of a letter, and autograph versions of many of the minor poems. Before his death in 1695, Sir Richard Graham, Lord Preston, had acquired part (not all) of Milton's Commonplace Book, with its many cross-references to a lost Theological Index. Before 1698 John Toland had acquired two letters of Diodati to Milton, the manuscripts of two unpublished prose works (which a 'worthy friend' had purchased from Milton's 'nephew'), and a corrected copy of the *History of Britain*. By 1681 the publisher Henry Brome had got hold of a manuscript of Milton's *Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines*, and another, different manuscript of this was in existence—to find its way eventually to Harvard

University. In 1682 and again in 1684 Edward Phillips was showing Aubrey manuscripts of the yet unpublished sonnets to Fairfax and Cromwell,[87] which Phillips finally printed in 1694 along with two other sonnets missing from the 1673 collected *Poems*. (Where are those manuscripts now?) Somebody, somewhere, in the seventeenth century had the drafts of state papers and other documents now known as the Columbia Manuscript. It was doubtless Phillips himself who sold to Moses Pitts the different collection of state papers that was published in two editions in 1676.[88] Phillips certainly had the three-volume manuscript of Milton's Latin thesaurus which was used in the compilation of a *Linguæ Romanæ Dictionarium* of 1693;[89] Wood says that Phillips had earlier, in 1684, made use of this for two books, evidently smaller, which have since disappeared.[90] What he did with the manuscript of Milton's Greek thesaurus we do not know.

We must not blame the widow; she could have had little notion of the functions of a responsible literary executor, and probably found Phillips a pleasant, trustworthy kinsman (he was eight years her senior) who would relieve her of the worry of disposing of a great clutter of papers. As for Phillips, professed bibliographer, biographer, and historian, we cannot help blaming him for not reporting, at the least, what papers he had salvaged. Students of Milton have been haunted, ever since, by rumours of manuscripts of this and that, allegedly seen by someone but then as quickly vanishing,[91] and by the thought that somewhere, unrecognized or inhumanely hidden by the owners, there may survive holograph manuscripts of, say, *Samson Agonistes*, or *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, or the projected epic on King Arthur, or the Piedmont massacre sonnet, or the angry rebuttal that Milton dictated, but never published, in his final years. Such speculation would be more romantic than scholarly were it not for the facts that Milton's collection of state papers came to light in 1743, his *De Doctrina Christiana* in 1823, his Commonplace Book in 1874, and his own Bible in 1884. Perhaps we have reached the end of such fortunate discoveries, and perhaps not.

John Phillips died about 1706,[92] a decade later than Edward, but the remainder of his biography, in our present ignorance of his career, is little more than bibliography, with a good many dubious titles.[93] He seems to have been a prolific writer and translator. Perhaps he made a decent living by his facile pen; in any case, we do not know what else he did. In 1695 Anthony Wood described him as 'a man of very loose principles, atheistical, forsakes his wife and children, makes no provision for them'. Since we know nothing about his marriage, not even the name of his wife, we must simply reserve judgement on this characteristically harsh condemnation. The bookseller John Dunton, describing Phillips as 'a gentleman of good learning and well-born', added: 'He'll write you a design off in a very little time, if the gout or claret don't stop him.'[94] These few comments by contemporaries provide doubtful grounds for any final estimate, but, noting them and noting also the gross indecency of some of his writing, most of Milton's biographers have taken a dislike to John which they have allowed to colour their characterizations of the young man who was an intimate member of the poet's household and his trusted amanuensis.[95] John early became such a coarse writer and 'Bohemian' that Milton must have broken with him in disgust! But there is, of course, no real evidence for this, and, evidence or no, it will strike the fairminded as a *non sequitur*. We had better leave this Rabelaisian pupil of the poet with the observation that his last known writing was a poem, published in 1706 as 'by a nephew of the late Mr. John Milton'. It was the first time since 1652 that he had referred publicly to their relationship.[96]

Having followed their fortunes this far, we may interject here a final, brief word about the Powell family. Milton's mother-in-law, Mrs. Anne Powell, made her will on 24 October 1678, and it was proved on 6 November 1682. Presumably she died in the latter year.[97] Her son Richard made his will on 29 December 1693, and it was proved on 3 February 1696.[98] The Forest Hill manor, after a succession of owners and tenants, was bought by Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1808, and was pulled down in 1854.[99]

## CHRISTOPHER MILTON'S FAMILY

Christopher Milton outlived his notorious brother by almost nineteen years. In April 1686, at the age of seventy, 'an ancient bencher' of the Inner Temple and an undistinguished justice of the peace (more recently, deputy recorder)[100] of Ipswich, he was suddenly elevated to serjeant-at-law,[101] baron of the Exchequer,[102] and knight.[103] One year later, he was appointed a justice of common pleas,[104] but the following year (early July 1688) he either retired or was dismissed,[105] after which he spent his declining days at Rushmere, in Suffolk.[106] Sir Christopher was buried at St. Nicholas, Ipswich, on 22 March 1693, at the age of seventy-seven.[107] There are many surviving records of his work as an attorney and judge,[108] of his membership in the Inner Temple (on the parliament 1672–85,[109] dues in arrears 1679),[110] of his divers activities in Ipswich[111] (he made accusations against various town officials in 1684),[112] and of his involvement in real estate transactions and suits in chancery.[113] Of the last mentioned, the most provocative to the biographer is a joint allegation with Richard Truelove, 10 February 1675, concerning their inheritance of the estate of James Caston—undoubtedly relatives, both, whose precise relationship with the Miltons I am unable to determine.[114]

For that matter, it is difficult to say a final word about Christopher himself. To his nephew, Edward Phillips, 'he was a person of a modest, quiet temper, preferring justice and virtue before all worldly pleasure or grandeur', whose promotions were rewards 'for his known integrity and ability in the law'. But to John Toland, whose biography (1698) frequently paraphrases Phillips, Christopher resembled his Roman Catholic grandfather, 'was of a very superstitious nature, and a man of no parts or ability.'[115] That the poet's brother eventually professed Catholicism seems probable,[116] and is an irony that biographers have relished, but we cannot date his conversion; it may have occurred as late as 1682. In any case, Christopher and John continued on friendly terms throughout the latter's life,[117] and afterwards, so far as we know, Christopher never spoke an unkind word against the author of *Eikonoklastes* and *Paradise Lost.*

We do not know when his wife, Thomasine, died.[118] Their daughter of that name was buried in Ipswich on 6 July 1675.[119] Another daughter, Sarah, who had been born at Horton in 1640, may or may not have died meanwhile.[120] There were, however, three daughters who were to live on into the next century, to be mentioned occasionally by the poet's biographers but never, it would seem, to be questioned about their famous uncle. On the evidence of legal documents they were illiterate, not even able to sign their own names. One, Anne Milton, born at Reading in 1641, seems to have become estranged from her parents. On 20 February 1683, when she was forty-one and living in the parish of St. Dunstan in the West, London (perhaps with her brother Thomas), she married a Protestant clergyman who was about eleven years her junior; their allegation for a marriage licence, 19 February 1683, reported 'her parents dead'.[121] John Pendleberry became vicar of Farningham, Kent, and died there on 9 December 1719.[122] Anne did not long outlive him; she died on 20 February 1721, leaving her goods to her two sisters, who were made joint executrixes of her will.[123] There were evidently no children.

The two sisters, Mary and Catherine Milton, never married, and lived on for many years in Highgate, in the parish of Hornsey. Mary, born at Ipswich in 1656, died in 1742, and administration of her estate was granted Catherine. Mary was buried on 26 April, not in London or in Ipswich, but in Farningham—further evidence of a close bond with Anne.[124] After her death, Catherine went to live with her cousin Deborah's daughter—the poet's granddaughter—Mrs. Elizabeth Foster, in Lower Holloway, Middlesex. She died there, aged about ninety, in April 1746, and she too elected to be buried in Farningham (1 May), with 'a broad stone' placed over her sister's grave and her own.[125] Reunited in death, they even exchanged identities in the parish register of Farningham, which mistakenly recorded Catherine's burial in 1742, Mary's in 1746. Nothing more is known about these two elderly spinsters, except for their testimony in a few legal records.[126] Nieces of the author of *Paradise Lost*, they were unable to read the epic, and there is probably nothing much they could have contributed to the nine or ten biographies composed during their lifetime.

Christopher lost at least three sons before his brother's death,[127] but had two others still at the Inner Temple, in training to become barristers.

Richard, the younger, may have been his favourite,[128] though it was an unusually long time before he was called to the bar.[129] In 1674 he was a resident of Cockfield, Babergh, in Suffolk,[130] and after 1676, when he became a barrister, he lived for a decade or more in Ipswich.[131] After his father's retirement, he went to Ireland, where he died intestate and unmarried.[132] We meet his name (sometimes with his father's) on various records that have survived.[133] Thomas Milton, the elder son, was the only one to perpetuate the family name, but the facts about his descendants are hazy. Born in 1647, he married Martha Fleetwood in 1672, and died in October 1694 at the age of forty-seven; then of the parish of St. Dunstan in the West, he was buried 'out of Fleet Street' on 17 October.[134] He had been called to the bar on 29 November 1677,[135] and, after the death of his uncle, Thomas Agar (1 November 1673), had succeeded him as Deputy Clerk of the Crown, a post he held for the remainder of his life.[136] His daughter Elizabeth, born about 1690, lived until 26 July 1769.[137] There were probably other daughters.[138] His son Charles was baptized on 20 January 1684. Administration of his estate was granted his relict, Martha, who remarried less than two years later, having removed, meanwhile, to the parish of St. Margaret, Westminster.[139] Her second husband was Dr. William Coward, with whom she lived, in Ipswich, until his death in early 1724. Both of them were involved in various lawsuits concerned with Thomas Milton's properties or debts.[140] Coward, an author on medical subjects, fancied himself as a versifier and as a literary critic; he published some comments on *Paradise Lost*, but seemed to have no special information or insights to offer.[141]

* * *

A thorough, full-scale bibliography of Milton for the years 1628–1800 continues to be a striking gap and great desideratum of literary scholarship. It is no undertaking for a neophyte, but some truly extraordinary collections await the trained bibliographer with patience and imagination enough for the attempt.[142] This biography will tell him, for the first time, where most of the books are to be found.

In his busy lifetime Milton published a total of thirty-two books or pamphlets, seven of which he subsequently revised and republished (twice in the case of the *Defensio*). Add to these thirty-two titles his edition of *The Cabinet-Council* and the collaborative *Responsio* bearing the name of John Phillips, and altogether, in the course of thirty-eight years (1637–74), he experienced about forty-two separate publications of his work—at least eighteen of them after he was completely blind. Impressive as this total may be, it does not give a clear notion of his bibliography for this period, nor does it include all of his actual writing. During his lifetime his first divorce tract and three Latin Defences were reprinted without authorization; his *Eikonoklastes* and *Defensio Prima* were published in

French and Dutch translations, respectively; nine of his works were reissued with new title pages; several of his official translations were printed; and half a dozen of his poems were included in the works of others or in collections. Then, after his death there appeared, not only his collected Letters of State (six editions 1676–1700), but also his *Character of the Long Parliament* (1681), his *Brief History of Moscovia* (1682), two fugitive prose pieces (in the collected *Works* of 1698), and, eventually, his *De Doctrina Christiana* (1825).

In the quarter of a century between the death of Milton and the death of Dryden there were only six years in which there was no new publication of a work of Milton, either in its original form or in translation or adaptation, and four different biographies of him appeared (out of six actually written). Not only his poetry but also his prose was published in 'complete' collections. The young, enterprising bookseller, Jacob Tonson, gradually acquired rights to all his verse, and in 1695 accorded him the treatment normally reserved for ancient classics. Milton's growing fame, and the relative appeal of his major and minor poems, can almost be demonstrated statistically, but the bibliographical story, though long and complicated—and not yet completely understood in all its details—should be at least sketched here, at some risk of superficiality. Milton aspired to greatness; his Protestant piety could admonish, but never extinguish, his Renaissance craving for worldly fame; hence his biography is not complete without that part of the sequel in which, posthumously, he achieved what he had worked so hard and long—and always so confidently—to achieve.

He died late in 1674, and in the next year the revised edition of *Paradise Lost* was reissued by Simmons with a new title page. Since only one copy of this issue is known to have survived, there is reason for believing that copies of the second edition were sold out even more rapidly than those of the first,[143] though Simmons did not reprint until 1678,[144] the year after Dryden's opera, *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, finally appeared, inevitably inviting comparison with the epic in blank verse. In 1676 two different editions of Milton's Latin state letters were published, aimed in part at an English audience.[145] To make surer of that audience, an English translation appeared in 1682,[146] and another, more accurate one appeared in 1694, the Latin text meanwhile having been reprinted in Germany in 1690.[147] A second edition of *The History of Britain* was published in 1677 by John Martin, who had acquired the rights to it in 1671, and was perhaps planning a revised edition shortly before Milton's death.[148] A 1678 reissue of the *History* bore the name of Mark Pardoe in the imprint.[149] After Martin's death, his widow transferred the rights in the book to Robert Scott—only a few months, evidently, after another bookseller, Henry Brome, had published *Mr. John Milton's Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines* (1681), which advertised itself as a hitherto suppressed part of the *History*.[150] When the *History* was reissued in 1695,[151] however, the *Character* was not included, and among Milton's earliest biographers, only Wood mentioned it.

Nothing by Milton was published in 1679, but in the following year Starkey brought out a second edition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*,[152] while an unknown publisher reprinted in folio Milton's 1659 tract against hirelings in the Church under the curious title, *A Supplement to Dr. Du Moulin, . . . With a brief Vindication of Mr. Rich. Baxter.*[153] The author was given as 'J. M.' The time was not yet propitious for the open reprinting of any of Milton's more controversial pamphlets, but there were ways of evading the authorities: in 1679, when nothing appeared over Milton's name or initials, Charles Blount had published *A Just Vindication of Learning*, which in large part was an adaptation of *Areopagitica*.[154] A decade later, a tract entitled *Pro Populo adversus Tyrannos* was largely a reprint of the first edition of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, cleverly adapted by someone to apply to the political situation forty years afterwards, and, though not so indicated in the tract itself, it was eventually advertised as by Milton in the Term Catalogues.[155] The dangers still inherent in such publishing were dramatized on 21 July 1683, when a convocation at Oxford condemned Milton's books in defence of regicide, forbade their reading to all members of the University, and had some copies publicly burnt. (Milton had the company of Baxter, Buchanan, Hobbes, Knox, and others on this inglorious occasion, and the Bodleian did not contribute its presentation copy of *Eikonoklastes* to the bonfire.[156])

Milton's innocuous *Brief History of Moscovia* was published by Aylmer in 1682,[157] and probably disappointed many purchasers expecting something more sensational and eloquent of its author. During this same year, in addition to the translation of the *Republican Letters* already mentioned, a German translation of the whole of *Paradise Lost* was published at Zerbst. The translator, Ernst Gottlieb von Berge, was not the only foreigner fascinated by the English epic: Milton's old friend, Theodore Haak, had already tried his hand at translating part of it, and his unpublished work had excited scholarly wonder and admiration in far-away Heidelberg a year or two before Oxford expressed its perhaps more ambivalent view of the poet.[158] In any case, during 1683, 1684, and 1685 nothing more by Milton appeared in print. (In 1684 Salmasius's *Defensio Regia* was reprinted at Cambridge.) Thomas Dring, who presumably still owned the rights to the minor *Poems*, did not try to reprint them, but in 1686 published instead *Paradisus Amissa*, a translation by 'J. C.' of the first book of the epic.[159] It was the harbinger of a succession of Anglo-Latinists who were seemingly determined to make Milton as intelligible to Virgil as Virgil so clearly was to Milton. What the later Latin translations by William Hogg (1690, 1699), 'T. P.' (1691), Charles Blake (1694), Matthew Bold (1702, 1736), Joseph Trapp (1741–4), and William Dobson

(1750–3) contributed to Milton's reputation either at home or abroad I shall not pause to conjecture, but certainly these men believed that they were devoting their time and energies to a true classic.

The story of the early critical reception of *Paradise Lost* has been told many times, and need not be retold here,[160] nor is it decent to hold another funeral over the quite dead notion that the poem was unappreciated until Lord Somers or Joseph Addison caused a laggard public to notice it. Probably more than 12,000 copies had been sold before Addison printed his stimulating and perceptive notes in the *Spectator* (1712), but, more important, the most influential critics of the previous age had well-nigh unanimously pronounced the epic a work of towering genius. As early as 1677 Dryden publicly called it 'undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced'—and shortly before his death he confessed to John Dennis that he had then not realized 'half the extent of his excellence'.[161] English literary criticism came of age in the decades following the Restoration, and in its early self-consciousness it seems to have felt an instinctive need for a great *national* poet. Shakespeare, as an actor-playwright, was disqualified; current fashion extolled Cowley, and a witty minority admired Rochester; but the empty pedestal which patriotic critics carried in their hearts called, they knew, for more grandeur than these could show. Blind Milton, with his sublime theme, his uncommon but intelligible English, and his explicit claim to divine inspiration, soon emerged as an obvious candidate. It was none other than the then poet laureate, in a conventionally extravagant epigram, who first made the nomination:

Three poets, in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;
The next in majesty; in both the last.
The force of nature could no further go;
To make a third, she joined the former two.

When Dryden penned these lines for the 1688 folio edition of *Paradise Lost*, a generous instinct perhaps caused him to go beyond his own sober judgement and the judgement of his contemporaries. But when the next century conducted the silent election, there were no other serious candidates.

The 1688 edition was an event of both social and patriotic, as well as literary, significance; it was, of course, the year of the Revolution, and some of Milton's unpoetical causes seemed at last on the verge of triumph. The book, elegantly illustrated, was published by popular subscription, more than five hundred Englishmen, distinguished and inconspicuous, lending their names to the printed list—among them Milton's old enemy, Sir Roger L'Estrange. As we have seen, Dryden handsomely supported the venture, which must have been largely due to the publishing astuteness of Jacob Tonson.[162] Not to be outdone, however, Randal Taylor brought out a folio edition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson* in the same year.[163] The new format eloquently advertised the publishers' confidence in the importance of their offerings.

Two years later, in 1690, professing to be printed in 'Amsterdam', *Eikonoklastes* made its reappearance in England, and created a not unnatural stir.[164] Also in 1690 a Scotsman, William Hogg, published his Latin translation of Milton's three major poems.[165] A third translator, almost certainly a Thomas Power, offered *Paradisi Amissi* in 1691,[166] when the epic itself was again for sale in a folio edition (the fifth), published by Tonson and Richard Bently.[167] Title pages of 1692 and 1693 show Tonson at last as the sole publisher.[168] Wood's ambivalent biography of Milton appeared in 1691. The following year saw a reprint of the 1658 *Cabinet Council* entitled *The Arts of Empire*,[169] and, significantly, an anonymous English translation (by a Joseph Washington) of *A Defense of the People of England*.[170] The last-named has a final leaf of recommended reading as an antidote to Milton's poison; the publisher (Nathaniel Rolls?) even assures us that the translator was dead, though in fact he was still alive. A reissue of this book in 1695 (two title pages) has survived in a very few copies.[171] The work attributed to Ralegh was reissued without Milton's preface and under a new title, *Secrets of Government*, in 1697.[172] In the year 1693 a *Linguæ Romanæ Dictionarium Luculentum Novum* advertised that it had made use of 'a large MS., in three volumes, of Mr. John Milton'.[173] The following year found the translators at work again, Hogg offering a Latin *Lycidas* and Charles Blake, in *Lusus Amatorius*, a Latin version of part of the fifth book of the epic.[174] The most significant event of 1694, however, was the appearance of Edward Phillips's important biography and bibliography, in his translation of Milton's *Letters of State*.[175] The work was anonymous (and no publisher put his name in the imprint), but Phillips's authorship soon became known.

In 1695, when Milton had been dead for only two decades (and Nicholas Rowe's edition and biography of Shakespeare were fourteen years away), Tonson offered the public 321 closely printed folio pages of annotation on *Paradise Lost* as a desirable supplement to a sumptuous first edition of *The Poetical Works*.[176] This monumental tribute by one Patrick Hume, the most voluminous notes on any English poet produced before modern times, made Dryden's likening of Milton to Homer and Virgil seem almost unrhetorical. England now had her national poet, her classic—and Jacob Tonson had a gold mine. Acknowledged imitation of Milton's blank verse had already begun (for example, with the second edition of the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse*, 1685),[177] and adaptations or paraphrases of *Paradise Lost* were soon to appear. In his rimed imitation of two books of *Paradise Lost* (1699), John Hopkins revealed that he began his paraphrase for the ladies, who found Milton too difficult, but 'when I did it, I did not so well perceive the majesty and noble air of Mr. Milton's style as now I do, and were it not already done, I must confess I never should attempt it'.[178] What Milton's style had, to a degree that no other English poet could boast, was perhaps best described by a word that became a touchstone of criticism in the next century. It had 'sublimity'.

This quality did not discourage some hundreds of inglorious would-be Miltons who should have remained for ever mute, but who aped, tirelessly and tiresomely, all the more superficial aspects of his style, creating a language ('poetic diction') that was no language because they were not to the manner born. If it were intellectually or ethically fair to condemn a man for the follies of his imitators, one could damn Milton above all other English poets—even above T. S. Eliot in our own time, or Donne in Milton's. Fairness, however, demands that we condemn the imitators instead, for failing to understand that a style can be distinctive precisely because it is personal, because it is the authentic voice of a distinctive individual.

The widespread, futile imitation of Milton's style was largely an eighteenth-century phenomenon, but before the seventeenth century reached its close, an equally curious—and closely related—phenomenon was also becoming manifest: the legend of Milton the Statesman ('Cromwell's Secretary') was already finding believers. As we have seen in these pages, his influence in the moulding of events, during his lifetime, was negligible; in no sense a leader of the Puritan Revolution, he was rather a minor figure, unusually eloquent but usually unrealistic in his outlook. After his death, however, a growing audience, willing captives to the poet, looked also into the prose and began to accept his achievements in controversy at his own proud evaluation. Even more readers, less appreciative of poetry perhaps, viewed the new national poet through the misty eyes of political nostalgia; yearning for 'the good old days', they seized upon Milton, the most articulate man of his generation, as a symbol of all that England had won and lost and might have again. Whig interests found him surprisingly topical; disgruntled republicans read him with satisfaction. His eloquent sentences expressed a cause that was still alive in the hearts of many of his countrymen. It is not surprising, then, that 1697 saw the publication of most of his English prose *Works* in one folio volume,[179] and the following year an even more ambitious and more reliable collection, in three volumes, of the *Complete . . . Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works*.[180] The latter professed to be printed in 'Amsterdam', but was almost certainly printed in London; it contained a prefatory biography by John Toland which was separately reprinted almost immediately (1699) in London. From the large number of copies that have survived it is clear that both these collections enjoyed a wide sale. The next editions of the collected prose were in 1738, 1753, 1806, 1809, 1833, and 1845 (the first American edition).

Such is the story of the seventeenth-century editions of Milton, except for two more contributions by the translator Hogg, whose Latin version of *Comus* was published in 1698,[181] and whose translations of the three major poems were reissued in Rotterdam in 1699, presumably to introduce the English poet to an audience that already knew him as a vigorous controversialist.[182] Published at Rotterdam in 1697, Pierre Bayle's *Dictionaire Historique et Critique* had included a biographical sketch of Milton the politician (drawn chiefly from Milton's *Defensio Secunda*), but had also mentioned the poems that seemed to be admired by some of Milton's countrymen.[183] In 1700, as the new century began, the editor (or publisher) of *Oliver Cromwell's Letters to Foreign Princes* called Milton 'a man, if of any religion, of the Romish stamp', and utterly damned the English prose works that people were beginning to read again. He deplored 'his unhappy talent of raillery', his 'stage and billingsgate language (though adorned with rhetoric and good Latin) joined with trifling sophistry, false quotation, and unfair use of ancient and modern authors'. But he added: 'As to his poetry and Latin pen, they were the glory of the man.'[184]

Here was the paradox that was to trouble literary criticism for the next two hundred years and longer. How can one reconcile intense admiration for the poetry with intense dislike of the poet's imagined character, as inferred from detestable opinions expressed all too effectively in the prose? The paradox does not seem to have bothered Jacob Tonson or many of the reading public for which he catered; having paid his publisher's tribute to the bard, and satisfied his folio-sized customers, he soon brought out cheaper editions. *The Poetical Works* was reprinted in 1705, 1707, 1711–13, 1720 (the 'Tickell edition' so called), 1721, 1725 (with a prefatory life by Elijah Fenton), 1727, 1730, and 1731. An edition of *Paradise Lost* alone in 1719 was the first to include Addison's important commentary. Tonson's exclusive rights to this valuable property were challenged in 1724 by George Grierson of Dublin, with editions of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and again in 1730, with an edition of *Paradise Lost* by 'the Company of Stationers' in London. But Tonson, as I have said, was an astute publisher; his 1732 edition of Milton's epic created a sensation. On the hypothesis (quickly proved false) that the earliest texts were extremely corrupt, Richard Bentley had proceeded to rewrite the poem, making it 'correct' by eighteenth-century (or his own) standards of taste. This classic example of misapplied scholarship was recognized as such immediately by satirists and literary critics. Instead of harm being done, Milton's words received closer attention than ever before (importantly from Zachary Pearce), and appreciation of his style increased. It was his second triumph over the most famous classical scholar that a generation had produced, and, though he would have disagreed, it was a more lastingly significant one than his victory over Salmasius. 'Miltonic' was thereafter a meaningful term, and Richard Bentley became a ridiculous character in Pope's *Dunciad*.[185]

Tonson died in 1736, but he had lived to see the beginnings of the translation of Milton into many languages besides Latin. *Paradise Lost* was made intelligible to the Dutch by Dr. Jacob van Zanten in 1728, and by Lambert van der Broek ('Paludanus') in 1730 and 1735. The Italian translation by Paolo Rolli, often reprinted in the century, was first published in part in 1729, and then complete the following year. Johann Jakob Bodmer's German translation, also often reprinted, made its initial appearance in 1732. More popular than any of these—indeed, published almost as often in the eighteenth century as the English original—Saint-Maur's *Le Paradis perdu* was first published at both Paris and Amsterdam in 1729. In 1730 the Abbé Mareuil's translation of *Paradise Regained* and some of the minor poems was offered to readers in Paris and at The Hague. Meanwhile, Voltaire had 'discovered' Milton and had praised the epic extravagantly, a posture he was later to regret as envy and dislike poisoned his first impressions.[186]

In 1737, shortly before the publication of Thomas Birch's scholarly biography and a new edition of the complete prose works, a monument to Milton was placed in Westminster Abbey.[187] If one seeks a tangible symbol of the fame that Milton sought, this will do, although it can be shown that the tribute was tardy for a variety of reasons. In any case, a monument makes a good stopping-place, and I must not unduly prolong this account, pleasant as it would be to recite later tributes and to trace the influence of Milton's thought and Milton's artistry, even to our own day.

He sought fame, and eventually it came to him. Or did it ever—in his own terms? In the closet drama of belles-lettres, Milton hath quit himself like Milton, and to Israel much honour hath left. But freedom? Or an inner paradise for Everyman? What mattered most to him, let us remind ourselves, was political liberty earned and then preserved by unswerving national morality. The idea is not irrelevant in an age when man can conquer space but cannot yet conquer himself. The poet of space knew, or thought he knew, how this greatest conquest could be achieved. Perhaps the fame he essentially sought is still to come. Perhaps his greatest monument will be our recognition that, essentially, he was right.[188]

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD
BY VIVIAN RIDLER
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

OXFORD BOOKS

*are distributed*
*throughout the world from*
*branches at*

LONDON GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE
WELLINGTON BOMBAY CALCUTTA
MADRAS KARACHI LAHORE
DACCA KUALA LUMPUR HONG KONG
SINGAPORE CAPE TOWN IBADAN
NAIROBI SALISBURY
JOHANNESBURG ADDIS ABABA
LUSAKA TOKYO

# *Oxford Books*

POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN MILTON
1. Paradise Lost
2. Paradise Regain'd, Samson Agonistes,
Poems upon Several Occasions, both English and Latin
Edited by HELEN DARBISHIRE
(*Oxford English Texts*)

JOHN MILTON 1608–1674
Poems. Revised edition
Edited by HELEN DARBISHIRE
(*Oxford Standard Authors*)

THE MANUSCRIPT OF PARADISE LOST. BOOK I
With a collotype facsimile of the Manuscript
Edited by HELEN DARBISHIRE

MILTON'S GRAND STYLE
By CHRISTOPHER RICKS

THE ITALIAN ELEMENT IN MILTON'S VERSE
By F. T. PRINCE

PARADISE LOST AND THE GENESIS TRADITION
By J. M. EVANS

MILTON AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION
By C. A. PATRIDES

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

19 811619 5 [9/69]